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[DOLORES TOOK THE REVOLVER FROM BASIL, AND WITH ALMOST SUPERHUMAN STRENGTH FLUNG IT INTO THE WATER!]

BASIL'S BRIDE.

CHAPTER I.

WEARY OF BREATH.

A LUXURIOUS room in one of the prettiest and most charming mansions in Park Lane. The window was open, and from between the curtains of rich silk and delicate lace a view could be obtained of the park, where beds of gorgeous tulips and hyacinths, now in the zenith of their blossoming time, made grand masses of colour, which stood out vividly and distinctly from the soft green of grass and foliage.

The May sunshine was warm and golden, the May air was scented with faint odours of lilac and laburnum, and the busy hum of London was softened to a low murmur, that seemed to find voice in the far off strains of a piano-organ, which, mellowed by distance, sounded musical and pathetic.

There were two occupants of the room, a man and a woman. Both were young, both

handsome, both possessed that indescribable air of high birth and breeding, which no amount of education can confer, which comes from centuries of refined luxury, and like genius, is born, not made.

The lady was seated on a couch, toying restlessly with the silver chains of the chataigne hanging from her waist. She was dressed in a tailor made gown of grey tweed, that fitted perfectly to the generous curves of her splendidly moulded figure.

She was a tall, well developed blonde, with fair hair, gathered in waves from her face, and piled high at the back of her head; her eyes were blue, of that cold tint that has more grey in it than ultramarine, and her features were classical and well-out. Undoubtedly she was beautiful, very beautiful, and art had aided nature in making the best of her charms.

"Is that your final decision Enlalie?" asked the young man, turning from the window, out of which he had been moodily staring, while he pulled hard at the long ends of his chestnut moustache.

Her eyes drooped under his gaze, and her

long taper fingers continued their restless play with the silver chain.

"What else can I say, Basil? If I were an heiress, and could afford to marry whom I liked, I should never think of breaking off our engagement; but that is not the case. I am dependent on my aunt for every farthing I have, the bread I eat, the clothes I wear, and she has set her heart on my making a grand marriage. Of course, so long as you were Lord Caesham's heir, she was very well pleased that I should be betrothed to you; but now—"

She hesitated. It was not easy to put what she wanted to say into plain language. Such language might have sounded brutally frank and crude in his ears.

"Well," she added, with a little outward gesture of her hand, "it is all different now."

He smiled bitterly. His handsome blue eyes—they were really blue, blue as the summer sea when the sunshine is upon it!—took a mocking light, even while they were full of infinite pain.

"Yes," he echoed, "it is indeed all different

now, as you say. And yet—strange as it may appear to you—I myself am the same man as I was before this son and heir of Lord Chesham came to take my place, as I was when I placed that ring on your finger in token of our engagement. It is only circumstances that have altered, not I."

She glanced down at the ring—a magnificent circlet of sapphires, which threw out azure rays of light as the sunshine struck across it. There was regret in her eyes at the thought of giving it up. It was so beautiful, and sapphires like these get every year rarer and more rare!

Very slowly she began drawing it off.

"Ah, yes! your ring. I must give it back to you, I suppose; and yet—"

He made a quick gesture of impatience.

"Why should you give it back to me? At least, keep it in memory of—what might have been."

His voice trembled a little over the last word. Good Heavens! how he had loved and trusted her, this beautiful old goddess, with the rose-flushed cheeks and the pale gold hair! How he would have sworn that she was the incarnation of everything fair and pure and good, a very queen of chaste and lovely womanhood!

She breathed a little sigh of relief, and slipped the ring back again; but he noticed that this time it was on a different finger.

"Very well. As you wish it, I will keep it. To be sure you would not be likely to make use of it again?"

"I should not have the chance of doing so," he returned, with grim satire. "You forget my creditors would take it, and sell it with my other jewellery in payment of their claims."

An upright crease came in the satin smoothness of her forehead. Creditors were such vulgar creatures, and had no respect for the most sacred things.

She was very glad they would have no chance of handling the gems that had flashed their starry radiance on her finger.

Besides, it was an absolute kindness to Basil to keep the ring, for his feelings would assuredly be hurt if she insisted on giving it back.

She sighed a little as she looked at him. What a splendid fellow he was! Nearly six feet high, and with a strong, well-knit frame, his close-cut curls of a sunny chestnut hue, and his heavy moustache shading from brown to gold, while his features were classically correct, though there was no trace of effeminacy in his appearance.

He looked what he was—a soldier and a gentleman. He would have been a husband of whom she might well have been proud. What a pity he was so poor!

Eulalie Stanhope ground her pretty sharp teeth together in a sudden access of rage and disappointment.

Here had Lord and Lady Chesham been married for fifteen years without a sign of children, and just when my lord's only nephew, Captain Chesham, had made quite sure of his inheritance, and had, indeed, been allowed a liberal yearly income by his uncle on the strength of it, Lady Chesham must needs go and have a son, and thus put an end to all Basil's chances of succession.

Misfortunes never come singly. The very day after the news of the birth of the child was announced to him, a certain race horse which belonged to Basil—and on which he had betted heavily in the hope of being able to pay off debts that had accumulated with alarming rapidity—came to grief, and instead of winning by a couple of lengths as he had fully expected, went suddenly lame, and was hopelessly in the rear, while an outsider passed the winning post at a canter.

Basil was no coward, and he had borne up bravely under these misfortunes. He did not grudge his uncle the happiness of having a son in his old age, although he wished the son had been born several years ago, and before

he himself had grown to regard the Chesham estates as a certainty.

Through it all he consoled himself with the reflection that at any rate he had won the love of a noble woman, who would be true to him, no matter at what cost.

And then she had met him with the announcement that their engagement was at an end!

The blow to him was terrible, and it required all his fortitude to meet it. But he was a soldier, and he crushed back with an iron hand all the misery, the bitterness, the hurt pride and wounded love that rose in his heart. Coming to her side he held out his hand.

"Good-bye, Eulalie. I suppose you have acted in the only way it was possible for you to act, and I hope the future won't give you cause to regret your decision. Good-bye, good-bye!"

She hesitated for a moment, then threw herself into his arms. Yes, she loved him as much as her worldly calculating soul was capable of loving anyone; but it was in a much less degree than she loved herself.

"Oh, Basil! it is horrible to part from you thus, and yet—and yet—"

"You have no other alternative," he said, gently.

He bent down and pressed one long passionate kiss on her lips, then almost roughly he put her from him.

"I must leave you. Your aunt will be wondering what on earth a poor unfortunate wretch like myself can find to say to the beautiful Miss Stanhope, who is to make the most brilliant marriage of the season!"

She did not notice the satire in his voice. Throwing herself again on the couch, she broke into a passionate fit of weeping; and then he left her, casting one long lingering glance behind, and afterwards hurrying away, with down-bent head and a face destitute of every vestige of colour.

His chambers were in the Albany, and thither he went. The rooms were luxuriously furnished, and bore witness to artistic taste on the part of their owner. There were pictures on the walls, statues and vases on pedestals and tables—all gems in their way, that he had picked up at sales, or in old curiosity shops.

Each one had a history of its own, and was fraught with some pleasant memory. Now they must all go; sacrilegious hands would be laid upon them, dealers and brokers would appraise them, Jews would haggle over them at the auction, and contrive to buy them at one quarter of their value; and when every one was sold, when furniture, jewels, clothes and all had gone, even then there would not be half enough to satisfy his creditors' claims, and his debts of honour must remain unpaid.

The young man covered his face with his hands, and gave a little moan of despair as he thought of this. His name would be dragged in the mire, all honourable men would shrink from him, his old friends would desert him—in a word, he would be dishonoured; and then what would life be worth to him?

"There is only one way out of it," he muttered, and he got up and went to a bureau in his dressing-room. Opening it, he took from it a case, which he unlocked, and then he lifted out the pretty silver-mounted toy it contained—dainty and harmless-looking enough, but with a deadly power in its tiny mechanism.

Some cartridges lay loose in the case. He fitted one into the revolver, then paused, and shivered slightly while he glanced round.

"Not here," he said to himself, "not in these rooms where I have been so happy, and where I have dreamt such bright dreams of the future. It would be a species of sacrilege."

At that moment his valet came in, and Basil hastily threw a handkerchief over the revolver.

"Did you ring, sir?"

"No."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir, I thought you did. Can I get you anything, sir?"

The man was looking at him uneasily, and Basil had a shrewd suspicion he must have been watching him through the keyhole, or from some other coil of vantage.

There was genuine sorrow in his aspect. Jarvis was not an especially emotional man, and by no means given to casual sentiment; but somehow or other his young master had contrived to find out the weak place in his heart, and had filled it as no one else ever had done, or ever would do.

"Let me see," said Captain Chesham, in a thoughtful tone. "I owe you three months' wages, don't I?"

"Never mind about that now, sir. I'm in no hurry."

"No—but I am!" Basil smiled slightly, as he drew two ten pound notes from his pocket—they were the last he had, and his account at his bankers showed a balance on the wrong side. "There you are. Now we can cry quits, and you had better go round to Mr. Lumley in Lincoln's inn, and tell him to come here immediately. Do you understand?" a little sharply, as the valet made no effort to move.

"Yes, sir," he returned, reluctantly. "I suppose you'll be here when I come back?"

"Why should I send for Mr. Lumley if I intended being out?" queried Basil; and Jarvis was apparently satisfied with the answer, for he bowed and left the room.

After his departure Basil sat down at his desk in the sitting room and wrote a letter. It was rather a long one—much longer than he was in the habit of writing to his lawyer. When he had finished it, he thrust it into an envelope, and directed it to

"J. Lumley, Esq.,
Solicitor."

Then he caught up his hat and gloves and returned to the dressing-room, where the revolver had been lying under the handkerchief all this time. Without ever glancing at it, he put it into his breast-coat pocket, and ran lightly downstairs.

A casual observer would have seen nothing unusual in his appearance—would have seen only a tall, handsome, fashionably-dressed young man, who hailed a hansom and sprang into it, after giving somewhat vague directions to the driver. Certainly there was no sign in Basil Chesham's aspect that he was going to his death.

CHAPTER II.

FOILED.

THE hansom bowed along at a good rate until the crowded streets and unlovely London houses were left far behind. The horse was a good one, and covered the ground rapidly, and soon the comparatively sylvan heights of Highgate were reached, and houses got fewer and fewer, while pedestrians dwindled down to a mere handful.

Basil got out of the cab, paid the driver liberally, then walked toward some woods close at hand. There was no hesitation in his step; he had the air of a man who, having arrived at a positive determination, goes straight on to his goal, always keeping his end well in view.

Presently he found himself in the woods, and under the dense green gleams of the over-arching trees. He had never been there before, although he had often noticed the woods as he passed them either riding or driving, and they had suggested themselves as a fitting place for the object he had in view.

He glanced round. It was very silent—not a soul in sight; not a sound to break the stillness save the hum of myriads of insects, and the melodious rapture of a blackbird, so glad that it scolded as if the song must burst the little throat from which it issued.

Basil unbuttoned his coat, and took from an inner pocket a small miniature. It was a

likeness of Eulalie Stanhope, and as he gazed on its beauty he was about to raise it to his lips and kiss it passionately. But before he could do this, some thought darkened his brow. No; she had proved herself unworthy of his love and trust—she had thought first of wealth and ambition, and had not hesitated to sacrifice to them the man to whom she had plighted her troth. But it would not do for this likeness of her to be found on—the body. Basil could not repress a shudder as he said the word to himself—it suggested such grim, such awful responsibilities. Nevertheless the idea must be faced, and he must at any rate shield the name of Eulalie from the slightest breath of scandal.

He threw the miniature to the ground and crushed it beneath his feet in amongst the mosses and ferns, and delicate shining little blossoms that sprang up between them. Then he took out the revolver, after glancing round once more to assure himself that there was no danger of interruption.

A little sound—he could hardly have said what it resembled—from somewhere above made him look upwards. But he could see nothing, and he supposed the noise must either have been produced by a bird, or have simply arisen from his own fancy. He held the revolver to his brow—shrinking back involuntarily from the contact of the cold steel with his warm flesh—and at the same instant, a clear, imperative, girlish voice, said,—

"Stop, for Heaven's sake, stop!"

But he was heedless of the warning, heedless of the fact that out of the branches of the oak under which he was standing, a small slight figure had rapidly descended with a lightness and agility of a dainty wood-nymph.

He had pulled the trigger with the reckless earnestness of a desperate man, and as in a dream, a thousand wild thoughts of the terrible hereafter flashed through his brain.

But what was this? The revolver would not fire. The trigger answered readily enough to his touch, he heard the click of the metal as the spring went down, but nothing followed, not even a report; and in another second the weapon was snatched violently away from him, and he opened his eyes to behold in front of him the most picturesque little figure it is possible to imagine.

A girl in the very first flush of dainty maidenhood. She could not have been more than sixteen, and there was in her aspect a charming mixture of childlikeness and womanliness.

She was small and slender, with great dark velvety eyes, and lips and cheeks of delicious carmine.

Her hair, which was of the light, dry, feathery order, tumbled about her head in a profusion of wavy curls, and on the top of it was set a crimson velvet cap, with a long tassel that fell to one side.

Her dress was white, or at least had been, for now it was slightly tumbled, and there were sundry green stains and rents on it, highly suggestive of climbing tree trunks.

"Are you mad?" she exclaimed, indignantly, holding the revolver in her two hands behind her back. "Do you know what a dreadful crime I have just saved you from committing?"

He looked at her a little bewilderedly. It was difficult to gather his thoughts together just at first, and there was even an element of unreality about the sudden appearance of this radiant vision, who seemed to have dropped at his feet out of the clouds.

"I am not mad," he returned, perhaps a trifle sullenly; "but I should be if I continued to live now that everything I value in life has been taken away from me."

"That is nonsense. Life itself is such a good and beautiful thing that nothing can warrant your wish to lay it down."

He smiled bitterly. This lovely child knew so little of what life really was—could not even guess the turgid depths of sorrow and shame that lay beneath the smiling, diamond

sparkling stream which to her represented existence.

"You are talking of what you don't understand," he said. "Give me back that revolver, and leave me."

"I shall do neither: the one thing nor the other," she returned, defiantly. "Do you think I am going to leave you to your own wicked devices, when it is quite clear that Heaven has given me the mission of saving you?"

"Saving me!" he echoed.

"Yes; saving you from yourself. Not from your true self, for your face looks kind and good; but from some horrible spirit that has taken possession of you, just as evil spirits took possession of people in olden times. Haven't you read about it in the Bible?"

Ah, yes, he had "read about it in the Bible"; and as she spoke, the memory of past days came back to him—of days when he had knelt at his mother's knee, and her gentle sweet-voiced counsel had sounded in his ears. The world had seemed such a beautiful place then, and life was full of grand, soul-thrilling possibilities. How inadequately those early dreams had been fulfilled!

"Don't you believe in Providence?" she went on, with her lovely eyes fixed gravely on his. "Don't you think it was Providence that made me choose this special tree this morning?" she pointed to it with one pink-tipped finger, "to climb up and learn my Latin verb in, so that I could see you all the time you were here? When you came first I intended remaining quite quiet, and never letting you guess I was there; but afterwards I understood what your object was, and I saw that it was given to me to save you."

There was a silence. Basil, who was ordinarily fluent of speech, found himself standing before her, conscience-stricken and wordless, like some criminal at the bar.

Besides this, a half superstitious fear was upon him. The whole affair was so out of the common, so unlike the ordinary every-day life, that it impressed him strangely; nevertheless, his purpose remained unchanged.

"Give me back the revolver," he said, again. "There is danger in its remaining in your hands. It might go off accidentally and hurt you."

She stepped back a few paces, so as to be well out of his reach, and holding the weapon high in the air, attempted to fire it. But the result was the same as it had been in Cheesham's case, and the young girl hastily examined the barrels.

"Why, every chamber is empty!" she exclaimed, coming nearer to him again. "You could not have done yourself any harm however much you might have tried."

A sudden comprehension flashed across Basil. He remembered Jarvis's reluctance to go on the errand to the solicitor's and he remembered, too, that he had left the loaded revolver under the handkerchief in his dressing-room while he wrote the letter to Mr. Lumley in the adjoining apartment.

No doubt the valet, suspecting his master's design, had taken the opportunity of stealing back and abstracting the cartridges from the chambers of the revolver, thus rendering it practically useless.

The young girl nodded her head sagely.

"You see now that Heaven was determined to take care of you. Aren't you grateful?"

"No," he exclaimed, savagely. "I have nothing to be grateful for. It would have been much better for me if I were lying dead here on the moss, as I should have been if only I had been left to myself."

She looked at him thoughtfully, and yet with a half-puzzled frown on her delicate brow. Then, with a strength one would hardly have expected from her, she raised the revolver high in the air, and flung it from her. A few seconds later there was the sound of a splash, as it fell with a dull thud into the water.

"Ah!" she said, with an air of satisfaction, "I thought I could throw it into the pond. In

future it won't do you or anyone else any harm. Now I want you to come with me."

"With you? Where?"

"To my home. It is quite near at hand, and my father shall talk to you. He will be able to make you listen to reason better than I can, perhaps."

Basil smiled at the absurdity of the proposition.

"No. I thank you very much, but I cannot come with you. Still it is better that you should go home without delay."

"I shall not go without you."

She spoke very quietly, but there was a tone of absolute determination in her voice.

"That is nonsense," he returned. "I am a stranger to you, and the circumstances under which we have met are not likely to gain me a welcome from your friends."

"You are wrong. My father is not like other men, and the circumstances of which you speak will make him interested in you. Besides, in your present mood you are not fit to be trusted by yourself—I should feel myself nothing more nor less than a murderer if I left you."

This was calling a spade a spade with a vengeance. Basil marvelled at hearing such words issue from those soft, rosy, childish lips. All the same, he was inclined to be annoyed at her pertinacity.

"Very well, then I will take the initiative and leave you."

He turned round shortly, but in an instant her hand was on his arm, holding fast with all the strength of her little brown fingers.

"Oh, you won't get rid of me so easily, I assure you! I always manage to have my own way when I am set on a thing, and I'm not going to let you shake me off, however much you may wish to do so. Where you go, I go—yes, even if I walk to London with you!"

She meant it, every word, and her clasp was so firm, that he could not, without real brutality, disengage himself from it. He looked down at her from his superior height. Her brilliant dark eyes met his unflinchingly.

"All right," he said, and angry and sad as he was, he was almost inclined to laugh. "If you won't let me go, I suppose I must remain here. We will see who will get tired the soonest."

She nodded, and unloosed her hold, apparently satisfied that he would attempt no mean advantage over her and escape before she could prevent him. While he took up his stand, leaning against the trunk of the tree from which she had descended, she stood opposite, a couple of yards away from him, her eyes fixed intently on his face, while his sought the ground.

And thus they remained, silent, motionless, for nearly an hour, and at the end of that time, Basil was almost beside himself with impatience, while his companion did not show the faintest sign of flagging. If anyone had passed, he would have wondered at the picture the two made, under the golden-green light of the sun-kissed leaves, immobile as two statues, stationed there to guard the woodland solitude.

At last Cheesham spoke.

"Aren't you tired of standing?"

"No. Are you?"

"Very."

"Then why don't you come home with me?"

"Because, as I have told you before, it is impossible."

"That is nonsense. However, it doesn't much matter, for my father will be here before very long. If I stay out longer than usual, he always comes in search of me, and he will be sure to look in this tree first."

She spoke with the most perfect calmness, like one who is certain of carrying her point sooner or later. Basil, to his own surprise, yielded to her will.

"Very well. If you will have it so, I suppose I must submit and let you take me

home. But I warn you the consequence won't be so agreeable as you seem to think."

"That is my affair, and if I am willing to take the risk, surely you have no right to complain!"

He shrugged his shoulders, and took the hand she held out to him, and the silence between them was not again broken until they reached a long, low, white house, half smothered in creepers, which stood in its own grounds well back from the road, and surrounded by a belt of trees that seemed to shut it in entirely from the outside world.

CHAPTER III.

A MIDNIGHT VIGIL.

FROM the verandah a gentleman came forward to meet the strangely acquainted pair. He was a man of about fifty or fifty-five, but his perfectly white hair and careworn face gave him the appearance of much greater age. His eyes alone looked young. They were large, dark, and brilliant as his daughter's.

"Father," said the young girl, quietly, "I have brought a friend home to dinner with us. I don't know his name, but I dare say he will tell it you later on. This is my father," she continued, to Basil—"Mr. Verschoyle, and I am Dolores Verschoyle."

Basil bowed, and did the only thing possible under the circumstances, i.e. mentioned his name. Mr. Verschoyle did not seem in the least surprised at the address of the introduction, but ushered his guest into the library, which had French windows opening on to the verandah. It was a rather large room, lined from floor to ceiling with book-shelves, whose contents—so Basil's quick eye at once told him—were both rare and valuable.

Dolores disappeared to change her frock, and the two men carried on a casual conversation, chiefly on the subject of books. It was easy to see Verschoyle was a scholar, and Basil fancied, from one or two hints he let drop, that he had made a special study of the mystic sciences.

"You are quite secluded here, although you are comparatively near London," said the young man presently.

Mr. Verschoyle smiled.

"Yes. No one would guess there was a house within these trees, and very few people know it. Doubtless being near London would seem an advantage to most people, but it is none to me."

"Don't you go to town often then?"

"Never. Sometimes a bookseller comes down if he has any special edition that he thinks I am likely to buy; but ever since we have lived here neither Dolores nor I have been a mile away from our own roof-tree."

"What about your daughter's education?"

"I conduct it myself. There are reasons why I wish Dolores to be constantly near me, why I should object to let her mix with other girls. She has lived the life of a nun, and you are probably the first stranger she has spoken to for years."

"And yet she does not seem shy!"

"No," said Mr. Verschoyle. "She does not know what shyness is. She is, I am glad to say, perfectly natural, and untouched by the conventional shame of society. The life she leads is pure and healthy and natural, and will fit her for battling with the world when the necessity for doing so arises."

"Has she lived here all her life, then?" asked Basil, interested in spite of himself by the unusual circumstances of his acquaintance.

"No," with some slight signs of finding the question an awkward one. "She was at school in France, and lived there during her early childhood." Mr. Verschoyle glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. "It is nearly dinner time," he said. "Would you not like to go

upstairs and attend to your toilet before the bell rings?"

Basil assented, looking down rather grimly at his hands, which were unusually in need of soap and water. It seemed strange to find himself engaged in all the little every-day occupations, when he had fancied that ere this he would have done with them for ever.

His host touched a small silver gong.

It was answered almost immediately by a bizarre-looking figure enough—at least to English eyes—a tall, slight Hindoo, wearing some white garment, and with a large white turban twisted round his head. His features were handsome and delicate, the eyes soft and intelligent. A heavy black monstache concealed the mouth.

Mr. Verschoyle addressed him in Hindostanee, and then turned to Chesham.

"Abdul will show you to your room. He does not understand English, but he makes up for this disadvantage by a wonderfully quick intelligence, and the slightest sign on your part he will be able to interpret."

Basil followed his conductor upstairs, feeling curiously like a man in a dream. When he returned to the library, he found Dolores sitting at her father's feet, attired in a clean white gown, made with the utmost simplicity and belted in at the waist by a broad soft sash of amber silk. She looked like a figure out of an Arabian Nights dream, rich, vivid, oriental.

Dinner was served in a room on the opposite side of the passage, and Basil was amazed at the luxury with which it was furnished. The dishes were of solid silver, the glass was beautifully jewelled Venetian, and though the food was simple, it was most exquisitely served, while the wines were such as would have rejoiced the heart of a connoisseur.

A man-servant, quiet, English, respectable-looking, waited, and Abdul remained near the buffet, his arms folded across his chest—silent, immovable as a statue, save for the burning fire of his dark eyes.

Coffee was served in the drawing-room, which was even more Eastern-looking than the other apartments.

It was partly panelled with sandal-wood, and the walls were hung with all sorts of splendid oriental embroideries, on which were placed gold and jewelled ornaments, shining weapons, and barbarous idols.

Jonches, cushions, and divans took the place of chairs, and Mr. Verschoyle proceeded at once to a rather cumbersome machine, which Chesham recognised as a hookah or narghyle.

"I do not smoke in your English fashion," he observed, with a smile, "I prefer the Eastern method."

He placed the tube of the curious-looking pipe in his mouth; it was filled with honey tobacco and fragrant herbs, and, as he smoked, the room was pervaded by delicious aromatic odours.

Dolores, in obedience to a sign from her father, presently left the two gentlemen alone, and for some time Mr. Verschoyle continued to smoke in silence, while he regarded his guest with a curious and searching intentness. By-and-by, he laid down his hookah, and said,—

"My daughter has told me how and where she met you. You must be in desperate trouble, or you would not have resorted to such a desperate remedy."

Basil's face flushed a deep, dark red. And yet there was nothing at which he could possibly take offence in the other's tone.

"I am indeed in desperate trouble," he returned, in a low voice. "Did your daughter also tell you that it was not of my own free will I came here?"

"She did, and I am glad that her pertinacity left you no alternative."

"It is very good of you to say so, I am sure," said Basil, a little stiffly.

He was not at his ease, and, naturally

enough, felt himself placed in a false position towards his host.

"I do not use the words in a merely conventional sense," went on Mr. Verschoyle, quietly, and yet earnestly. "I am a fatalist, and I believe it was fate that threw you across my daughter's path. This being so, I am inclined to take up the challenge destiny has flung before me. In other words, I am both anxious and willing to help you if you will confide to me your difficulties. Also, I may add, that if money is of any avail, you may command it to an unlimited extent!"

Captain Chesham was so taken aback by this offer, that for a few minutes all he could do was to stare in simple amazement at the speaker.

It is true he judged from the interior of the house that its master must be the possessor of great wealth, but hardly so great as Verschoyle's words implied.

"You are very good," he said again; "but although I appreciate your kindness to the full, I must not take advantage of it. We are strangers, you must remember."

The other smiled in a peculiar manner.

"Are we? Hardly so much as you think. Come with me, and I will prove to you that I know at least something of your past!"

He went to the other end of the room, threw aside some of the rich draperies, and touched a spring in the panelled wall. The panel moved back, leaving a space about as large as an ordinary-sized door, and through this Verschoyle passed, while the younger man followed.

When they were both inside, the panel glided back to its place, and Basil found himself in a small apartment without, apparently, either door or window, and lighted in some mysterious manner from the ceiling.

The walls were covered with charts and cabalistic signs; a small silver chafing dish stood on a tripod in the centre, diffusing around some pungent incense, and immediately before it was what looked like a globe, covered with a dark velvet cloth.

Verschoyle drew off this cloth, thus revealing a large sphere, seemingly cut out of one solid block of crystal. He motioned his guest to draw nearer.

Slowly and suspiciously Basil did so, and Verschoyle, keeping his dark, brilliant eyes fixed steadily upon him, took his hand and held it while he spoke.

"Look into that globe," he said, in a very low tone, "and you shall see scenes of your youth rising before you!"

Impressed, in spite of himself, by the earnestness, verging on solemnity, of the man's manner, Basil did as he was bidden.

Often and often he had laughed to scorn the professions of second-sight, spiritualism, and necromancy; and yet, for all his scepticism, he felt a thrill of cold terror run through his veins as that burning glance remained fixed on his face, and he awaited with rapt expectancy for what the crystal would reveal.

For a few minutes it showed nothing at all, then the clear depths began to grow misty, opaque. Light clouds rose up, like water into which milk has been thrown. Slowly, very slowly, these took shape; and at last Basil found himself gazing at a picture that he remembered all too well.

The scene was a terrace in front of a fine old Elizabethan mansion, and from its steps led down to a smooth expanse of velvet-green turf, along which a couple of gaudy-plumaged peacocks were strutting, their jewelled tails spread well out in the sunlight. Over the marble balustrades dividing the terrace from the lawn a lady was leaning—a fair woman with a sweet pale face and yellow hair, and by her side was a handsome boy.

Both of them were peering the peacocks with rose-petals from the bush of gloire-de-Dijon that wreathed a pillar near which they were standing. Suddenly a shadow fell on the sunlit terrace. Two men appeared from the other end, carrying between them a roughly-constructed litter, and on this litter a man's

form was stretched out, inert, lifeless—the form of Robert Chesham, with a ghastly wound on his forehead. He had been thrown from his horse, and his head had struck on a huge sharp-edged stone that lay by the roadside.

Basil hastily snatched his hand away from Verschoyle, and at the same moment the scene in the crystal faded, grew white and shadowy, the depths finally settling into quiescence.

"I don't know by what art you have conjured this picture before me," he said, in agitated accents; "but it is a true representation of the hour when my mother and I learnt of my father's death."

Verschoyle carefully covered the magic crystal before answering.

"Never mind my art," he said, quietly. "What I want you to understand is that I am a man able to fulfil my promises, no matter what they may be. I asked for your confidence, and you did not seem inclined to give it. Perhaps there is no necessity for you to do so, seeing that I know quite enough of you to suit my purpose. Your name you told me, and now I tell you, Basil Chesham, that you have been driven to the crime of trying to take your own life, by the fear of dishonour. You have debts, both of the turf and the gaming table, that you are not in a position to discharge. The woman you loved has jilted you, and you have lost the inheritance you thought would be yours, in consequence of the birth of a son to your uncle—Lord Chesham. Have I stated all this correctly?"

"So correctly that I am lost in amazement at your knowledge. Where you obtained it from is an utter mystery to me."

"And for the present let it remain a mystery. This much I may tell you: I knew your mother, and I would do a good turn for her son if it were possible. Do you believe me?"

Basil looked at him fixedly, then held out his hand with a frank gesture of friendliness.

"Yes, I believe you."

"That is well. Now go to bed, and sleep in peace. In the morning I shall have a proposal to make to you, which, if I mistake not, will rid you of all your troubles."

The young man obeyed, so far as going to his room went; but he was too excited to sleep. The scene he had viewed in the crystal had taken hold of his imagination in a very unusual degree, and his soul was possessed with a desire to see the wonderful globe once more, to examine it quietly, and convince himself that it was really a clear crystal, without any hidden machinery by which pictures could be produced at the will of the operator.

He waited until the house was quite quiet, and midnight was long past. Then he slipped downstairs, and into the drawing-room, where a faint light from one of the lamps was still burning, just sufficient to show the outlines of the furniture. He had watched Mr. Verschoyle very closely when he opened the panel, and again when he closed it; so he had no difficulty in finding the spring, which acted perfectly noiselessly.

A moment later and he stood in the aperture; but he did not advance, for the scene upon which his eyes fell, was sufficiently startling to hold him rooted to the spot.

The scented herbs and spices were still burning, and their fumes rendered the atmosphere dim and misty; nevertheless, it was quite easy to distinguish in the middle of the room two forms—one that of Mr. Verschoyle, the other that of a woman.

The latter was tall, slight, and commanding-looking. Her hair, which was very long, fell in heavy waves below her waist, and she wore a robe of black velvet, whose lines seemed to fall from head to foot with a classic severity, which added to the stateliness of her appearance.

She was standing motionless in front of the crystal, and the light from the swinging lamp above her head showed her white and agitated face—a very beautiful face, though worn and haggard.

On a divan near was seated Mr. Verschoyle,

his head in his hands, and his attitude expressive of profound despair. Both he and his companion were too absorbed in their own thoughts to be aware of the presence of a witness, and Basil was held motionless by surprise.

"You are sure of what you say—sure that there is no possibility of mistake?" said Mr. Verschoyle, raising his head suddenly.

"How can there be any possibility of mistake?" she responded, in low, level tones, so clear and musical that they sounded like some silver flute. "Does the crystal ever err?"

He shook his head despondingly.

"No. But you may have interpreted its meaning wrongly."

A faint, scornful smile curved her lips.

"Do not buoy yourself up with that hope. The fates have pronounced your doom, and there is no appeal."

"No appeal!" he echoed, miserably. Then with more vigour, he added, "It is not for myself I care. Life has grown very weary to me, and I would lay it down willingly; but Dolores—oh! it is terrible to think of leaving her!"

He buried his face in his hands once more, and, by the light above, Basil could see the rapid changes that swept over the woman's pale features.

With a movement of vehement passion she flung herself at his feet, and, seizing his hand, pressed it against her lips.

"Has not the time come, Sigismund, when I may be released from my vow? May I not watch over her? May I not pour the treasures of love which my heart enshrines at her dear feet? Surely the expiation has been bitter enough, and justice may be tempered by mercy!"

There was heartrending anguish in her voice, but he was not moved by it.

"Never!" he exclaimed, harshly. "You forget, you have no right to what you plead for."

"Oh, yes, yes!" she exclaimed, wildly. "Love gives me the right in spite of all you may say. If you would but believe it—if you would but believe it!"

He rose and shook her off, but the beautiful woman still continued to kneel at his feet.

"Have I not been merciful?" he demanded, sternly. "Have you aught to reproach me with?"

"No, no; a thousand times no!"

"All through my life I have striven to do to others as I would they should do to me," he continued, in a shaken and yet cold voice. "I have had my own measure of justice, and I have meted it out to myself as unsparingly as I have to others. Now my life draws to a close—in forty-eight hours, you tell me, it will be at an end—"

"I did not say so soon as that," she interrupted, quickly. "My knowledge would not carry me so far. I said the thread of your life would soon be cut, it might be in forty-eight hours."

"And, so far as I know, your knowledge has never played you false. You have a great gift, which places you outside the pale of ordinary womanhood—"

"And yet does not give me protection against womanhood's greatest needs!" she said, vehemently.

He protested not to hear the interruption.

"As I have so little time, it behoves me to make the most of it. There are many things I must do, there is much to think of. Now leave me, I dare not lose one of the precious moments."

She rose slowly to her feet, and the action seemed to give back to Basil the power of volition that he had temporarily lost. So amazed had he been at the strangeness of the scene that it had not struck him he was playing the part of eavesdropper.

Now he stepped back into the drawing-room with a flush of shame rising to his face, and then went on upstairs, wondering more than ever at the strange house into which he had been led.

Who was the mysterious woman with the beautiful face, and the wild dark eyes? What was the tie that bound her and Sigismund Verschoyle together?

(To be continued.)

JASPER PALLISER'S GRANDDAUGHTER.

CHAPTER XIII.

"IT IS MY HUSBAND."

If Mrs. Clara Madison had been in Brighton, as Mrs. Macdonald believed when she left London, she would in all probability have opened her friend's eyes to the gossip going on about her, and to Rosalynn's relations with Nella Danvers; but Mrs. Macdonald had found, when she reached Brighton, that her friend had flown to the south, and was not likely to return to England for several months.

She had no friends, therefore, sufficiently intimate with her to dare to take upon themselves the responsibility of advising her, and her intimacy with Rosalynn continued and increased without any of the whispers from the outer world reaching her ears.

Rosalynn pursued his purpose with energy. He devoted himself with all the cleverness and fascination he possessed to win Mrs. Macdonald's love, and before very long he had established an influence over her which made him more than certain she would refuse him nothing he chose to ask.

Gradually she succumbed to his attractions, forgot her prudent resolves, forgot her doubts, and forgot poor Silas Brookfield and all his love and care for her. Rosalynn had conquered; he had become the one man in the world to her, the one man for whom she would willingly give up what she had learnt from bitter experience to prize most in the world—her liberty.

It had been a struggle, but he had won it, wondering to find the handsome American so much harder to bring to reason than he had expected. Most women—women of her sort, and in her position—would have yielded far more readily, he thought, than she had.

Had she held out from pure coquetry, or had she really more strength of character than the generality of her sex? he wondered, with careless curiosity; if the latter, he might find it go against him in the future.

Women, he thought, should have no ideas, or opinions, or any strong convictions, likes, or dislikes. The weaker and more characterless they were, the easier would it be to rule them, the less would they be able to struggle against the will of their lawful possessors.

Not that he believed any woman's will would be difficult to him to subdue; but it would be pleasanter to have a wife without prejudices, ready in all things to submit herself to him without question or dispute.

Needless to say, he took good care to conceal these views from Amanda Macdonald, however. To her he made it appear that he was the champion and ardent admirer of her sex, looked upon them as on an equality with—if, indeed, they were not superior to—his own; and felt it to be a privilege to be her adorer, her humble slave and servant.

"I must make her give me an answer at once," he muttered one day, a week or so later, putting away a letter he had just received from his friend and factotum, Captain Grant. "As George says, it's no use hanging off; I must come to an understanding with Amanda at once, and get out of it with poor little Nella as soon as I have done so. It's all up with her chances of being left in possession of her property, it seems—so Hume says. I'm sorry for her, but under the circumstances I can't marry her; it would be disastrous for us both."

So saying he started off to Mrs. Macdonald's

ledge, knowing that the fair widow would be exposing his daily vice, and was probably on the look-out for him to arrive.

"The lovely flowers you sent me!" she cried, as he entered. "You're real good, Lord Rosallyn, you seem to know my taste so exactly; those roses, they're just heavenly, and the colour I like best; so many thanks!" and she gave him her hand, looking kindly into his face.

"You are charming," he answered. "So easily pleased—a few flowers like those to win me the delight of having pleased you! Ah! if you would but let me, if you would only trust me—"

He paused.

"Trust you? I do trust you, Lord Rosallyn," she said, looking down.

"Yes, but how far?" he asked. "What would you trust me with? Ah! Amanda, surely you know what I want, what I long for?"

She coloured, and her heart beat fast.

"I—I hardly know, I hardly understand," she began.

"No?" he replied, with the tenderest reproach in his voice; "have you not seen—divined it then? May I tell you?"

She did not reply; he sat down beside her and took her hand gently.

"Can you trust me quite, wholly and entirely? Can you trust me with your own dear self?" he said, in a low soft voice. "I love you, love you with all my soul; to call you my wife is the one, the deepest wish of my heart. Ever since I first knew you I loved you. I loved you when I left America. I love you a thousand times more now."

As he spoke, the face of Elias Brookfield rose before her—his calm, truthful, reproachful face—and she tried to disengage her hand from Rosallyn's clasp.

"My lord," she faltered.

"Nay, listen to me dear one," he continued, warmly. "You do not know how I longed to tell you this ere I sailed, but I dared not. I was not sure there was hope for me. Why, I asked myself, should she be willing to leave her home, her friends, her country for my sake? What have I to offer her worthy of such a sacrifice? Often I was on the verge of telling you what I have told you now, and I was afraid, I could not; but now, since we have met again, now that you are here and have seen England, that you have left your country of your own free will, I am emboldened to tell you all that is in my heart. You will not be cruel to me, my darling? you will promise to be mine, will you not? I never loved anyone as I love you, Amanda, I swear it."

Something in his tone, in his last words, jelled on her; there was a false ring in them she could not fail to detect; her doubts of his sincerity came back. She hesitated before reply.

"You do me a great honour, Lord Rosallyn," she said. "I am but a plain American woman, my father was a farmer, my people are—"

"What care I for that? You are one of nature's rarest queens," he cried, passionately, pressing her hand to his lips.

"Ah, you say that now, but maybe in years to come you might feel differently about it, you know, and look down on me; and I'm a good woman in my way; it would make me feel bad—"

"Look down on you; I?" cried Rosallyn. "My beautiful love, what are you thinking of? Put such thoughts out of your head. It would be impossible."

Amanda shook her head; she was sorely pained—terribly tempted; she knew not what to say.

"I wish—I wish," she said, tremulously.

"What do you wish, tell me?" he asked, gently.

"I wish I knew it—if you really mean it all?" she said, shyly. "It seems so strange

that a man like you, accustomed to be amongst the highest and best in the land, should really prefer a woman of no birth or breeding to them all. It's almost to believe you really do, you know, and yet—"

"Why should I try to deceive you?" he answered. "I dare say there are women whom you call women of birth and breeding who would marry me if I asked them, artificial, faded, pleasure-loving women of the world, without a heart in their bosoms, thinking only of fashion and frivolity; but it is not to a woman of that sort I would give my heart, or who I would make my wife. I love you because you are what you are—simple, sincere, truly noble. Amanda, make me happy, be my wife. I never loved but you, really."

He sank on his knees beside her, and his arm stole round her waist; their faces were very near each other, she seemed to be yielding, when suddenly a revulsion of feeling caused her to free herself from his arm and draw herself away.

"I—I must have time—I must consider," she said.

For a moment a dark ugly look crossed his face.

"Have you never thought of it? Have you never imagined how it was with me?" he asked, reproachfully.

"Perhaps," she answered, blushing, "but I was not sure."

"You are sure now, though, are you not? Ah! my love, my darling, I can see you do care for me, you do love me, hide it as you may. Well, take your time, wait, but be merciful. When may I come for my answer?"

"I must have a few days," she faltered. "Let it be a week hence."

"A whole week? You are cruel!" he cried.

"On Saturday, then," she said, hurriedly. "Saturday, very well, I must be content, I suppose," he answered, in a tone of resignation. "And now, love, my own dear love, my future wife—ah! you see, I feel quite sure what your reply will be, Good-bye; I must leave you, but my heart remains with you. I shall think of you night and day."

He put his arm round her, and, in spite of her reluctance, drew her towards him, and kissed her forehead; then he turned away and left the room quickly. Hardly had the sound of his footsteps died away on the stairs when the portière that hung across the door which divided the drawing-room from the bed-room was pulled aside, and Tessa entered.

She was white as death and speechless with agitation, her eyes were wild and full of passion, her white teeth were firmly clenched. She walked across the room till she stood before Mrs. Macdonald, and gazed at her with flashing eyes, whilst her beautiful features worked convulsively.

Amanda looked at her in fear and astonishment.

"Tessa!" she cried, "what is it?"

"That man," she said, hoarsely. "Why did you deceive me?"

"I did not deceive you. What can you mean?" cried Amanda.

"You did deceive me; did you not tell me he was Lord Rosallyn?" replied Tessa, in the same tone.

"And he is!" she answered.

"You lie," cried Tessa, furiously; "he is Roderick Calvert, my husband."

Amanda started violently.

"Good Heavens!" she cried, "are you mad? Your husband, and—"

"Mad! Would-to Heaven I was! It is to save you I tell you so. That man, I repeat, is Roderick Calvert, my husband, and I heard the villain ask you—you!—but five minutes ago, to be his wife."

Mrs. Macdonald fell back with a groan.

"Oh! it is only to save you who have been so good to me, and who saved me from a fearful death, I tell the truth. Listen, madam,

believe what I say; this man; let him call himself what he may—"

"He is Roderick Calvert—Lord Rosallyn? I do believe you, Tessa," answered Mrs. Macdonald; "but can't it be possible—can he be the wretch, the villain—"

"A wretch, a villain of the deepest dye," returned Tessa, wildly. "Oh! the shame, the misery, the anguish that man has made me suffer. What tortured he, when he abandoned me, what became of me. I might have died—starved—he never so much as inquired; perhaps even he believes me dead, as for years no news of me has reached him. Madam, if I have saved you from this villain I have partly paid you the debt of gratitude I owe you. Oh! he is false, wicked, treacherous."

"False! yes, indeed, Tessa, my poor child, my poor injured darling. What misery you have saved me from! Ah! if I had married him—and my foolish vanity might have led me to accept him—what a fearful fate mine would have been! I thank you from my heart."

And she held out her arms to Tessa.

The wild angry light died out of the girl's eyes. She flew to her friend, and, throwing her arms round her, burst into a passion of tears on her shoulder.

"I listened—can you forgive me? I listened to all he said. His voice—I thought I could not be mistaken, that it was his voice, I nearly came in before he left you, but I could not. I was afraid, my knees failed me, I almost fainted. Oh! if Giovanni were only here," she faltered.

"Giovanni will come soon," said Mrs. Macdonald, carelessly.

"Yes, and—and you will say nothing to him till Giovanni comes? I shall feel safe then; Giovanni will protect me from him. Oh! it was so terrible to see him, to hear him—it brought all the awful past back to me, all I suffered. Tell me" (and she looked timidly into Amanda's face) "how is it with you, dear madam? you will not suffer as—as I did? your heart will not—"

"Tessa, Tessa, don't you make me ashamed of myself, my dear!" said Amanda, humbly. "No; it is not my heart that will suffer. My miserable vanity is hurt, my pride and self-respect are wounded. Oh! I hate myself when I think I almost believed him—almost made up my mind to say 'yes'!"

"Thank Heaven," said Tessa, gravely. "What—what ought we to do, dear madam?"

"I hardly know—of course I will never see him again," she replied; "but you—"

"Let us wait till Giovanni comes," said Tessa.

"Yes, if you wish. At any rate, we are safe till Saturday—or should I write? I must think about it," answered Mrs. Macdonald; "but do not you fear, darling, he shall not hurt you."

Tessa shuddered.

"You do not know how evil he is! I tremble to think he is so near me, even though he does not know I am here. Ah! if he could kill me, dear madam, how gladly he would do so. It would be a bad thing for me if he found out I was alive and here. Ah! you smile, you think we are safe. Remember, already in this very country my life has been in danger; only your intervention saved me from the most cruel of deaths."

It was late that evening when Lord Rosallyn got to town; but, late as it was, he called upon his lawyer at his private residence.

"Anything new turned up in the Palliser matter?" he asked, carelessly.

"Hum!" replied Joseph Hume. "There's only one thing for you to do, my boy, and that is to be off with the old love—it's all up!"

"And on with the new, eh?" replied Rosallyn, with a smile. "I'll follow your advice at once, Hume."

CHAPTER XIV.

BETWEEN TWO STOOLS.

"It is a week since Roderick was last here, Aunt Della," said Nella, gravely, to Lady Vane, as the two ladies sat more together in the boudoir in Nella's town-house. "Why is it he does not come, do you think?"

"I—I really don't know," returned Lady Vane, in a vexed, puzzled tone. She suspected shrewdly enough why it was, and was getting terribly uneasy and frightened about her niece's affairs, her marriage as well as her money matters, but she would not let Nella see how disturbed she was, for she liked a cheerful companion, and did not wish to depress her. "Perhaps he is not in town, child."

"Oh yes, he is," returned Nella. "Mrs. Gloucington saw him yesterday, and Lady Conway said he was at the Giffordists' on Monday. I—I think it is strange of him, aunt, and—I don't like it!"

"If he is in town, it is strange," replied Lady Vane; "but men are strange, Nella; it will be better to say nothing, my dear."

"I heard people talking about him at the Pierpoints, on Tuesday," went on the girl, gravely, not heeding Lady Vane's words. "I couldn't help hearing. I couldn't get away from them, there was such a crush, and—"

"And what were they saying?" asked Lady Vane, her face flushing with annoyance. "Never listen to gossip, child, it's a fatal mistake."

"I couldn't help hearing," replied Nella, wretchedly, "and I hardly like to repeat what they said, even to you."

"Oh! I'm sure you may be open with me, dear," cried Lady Vane; "but whatever it was, you may be pretty sure it was false or exaggerated."

"If it weren't for the way Roderick's behaving now I might think so," answered Nella. "They said, aunt, for one thing, that if—I lose my money, Roderick would never marry me, and one offered to bet the other he wouldn't. He said Roderick was nearly 'dead broke,' whatever that may mean, and couldn't afford to marry a girl with no money and—"

"Well, at any rate, you know that is false," cried Lady Vane, who, though she knew that Rosalynn was not rich, yet had no idea that he was ruined.

"I don't know. They say he lost all his money long ago—before he proposed to me, and that—that I can't believe this, aunt—he is every day at Brighton now, though we have left in company of a rich widow, a woman he knew in America—"

"Gossip—gossip and scandal," cried Lady Vane, angrily. "I am surprised at your paying any attention or believing such slanders—"

"I said I did not believe that part of it," answered Nella, meekly; "but yes, aunt, there are little things that make it look as if it might have some truth in it."

"Nella!" exclaimed Lady Vane, indignantly.

"Yes," answered Nella, "there was someone at Brighton Roderick used to visit; I knew that, though he never told me, and I did not like to ask who it was."

"You knew it?"

"Yes, I saw Roderick on one or two occasions go to, or come out of, a house on the Steyne Walk; but I never said anything, though I knew at the time he did not know I had seen him, and had reason to believe—for he had told me himself—he was elsewhere."

"An accident, perhaps," said Lady Vane.

"I don't think so," answered Nella. "Aunt Della, do you think Roderick loves me?"

And she looked earnestly at her aunt. "Surely you should know better than I do," replied Lady Vane. "It seems to me that Roderick's manner to you is everything that could be desired—"

"His manner, yes, he has very fine manners," replied the girl; "but his heart, aunt, his heart?"

"I have no reason to imagine for an instant his heart is not your's, Nella," replied Lady Vane.

"Well, we shall see," said Nella, mournfully. "When I have lost all my money, when the dear old Court is mine no more, then I shall learn who my friends and who are not—who loves me, and who doesn't."

"Don't talk like that, child. One would think that things had come to the worst. Don't be so desponding," cried Lady Vane, impatiently. She was one of those women who shut their eyes to all possible misfortune, dance on the edge of their own grave as it were, and then, when the end comes, collapse utterly, without making an attempt to fight against misfortune.

Nella's forebodings and low spirits worried her. If her fears were realized, it would be a terrible thing, for her niece would be penniless, and the world would probably consider that it was her duty to do something for her, and a pauper relative was what Lady Vane dreaded more than anything in the world.

Lord Rosalynn had waited a few days before taking the final steps for breaking off his engagements with Nella, waiting for the further result of an interview between his lawyer and Mr. Parker. That having taken place, and Mr. Hume reporting that Mr. Parker, though he still showed fight, had not a leg to stand upon, and that Jim Rogers, or rather Mr. James Roger Palmer was undoubtedly Jasper Palliser's legitimate grandson. Rosalynn sat down to concoct a letter to Lady Vane, informing her that having met with serious losses that had reduced his income very materially, he was reluctantly compelled to relinquish his claim to Miss Danvers' hand, marriage being for the time out of the question for him.

He touched lightly on the probabilities of Nella's income being also greatly diminished, expatiated on the grief and sorrow, the agony and despair, the prospect of the parting filled him with; but honour (he said) forbade him to implore her to become the wife of a ruined man, and to link her fate with one so unfortunate as himself. It was a knowledge of what was hanging over him that had kept kept him away for the past few weeks, he had not dared to trust himself in her presence.

Lady Vane, he begged, would explain to her niece the trouble and misery he was suffering, and the reasons that induced him to give her back her word, and resign his cherished hope of making her his; and with every wish for Miss Danvers' future happiness and well-being he remained ever, Lady Vane's sincere and unhappy friend, Rosalynn.

"That will do the business, I think, Hume, eh?" he said, as having finished the letter he tossed it across the table to his lawyer.

"You see I've put it all on my losses. If they apply to you they will find out, by jove! the reason's not a false one. Lady Vane, I've never imagined me a rich man, but she didn't imagine I'd less than nothing, ha! ha! She wanted to see her niece a Countess, but I don't think she would have let her marry me, for all that, if she'd known the real state of affairs. If she's once convinced of it, we shall have no trouble, she'll be quiet enough. I'm sorry for Miss Danvers. What will become of her, I wonder? She'll be at Lady Vane's mercy now, I suppose; but a pretty girl like she is will soon pick up with someone, no doubt!"

"Yes, I don't suppose she'll wear the willow for you for very long, Roderick," replied Hume, slyly. "Yes, the letter will do its business, I fancy; seal it, and I'll send it off. Take care no hint of this reaches the fair widow's ears!"

"How should it? she knows no one," replied Rosalynn, carelessly. "There you are, Hume."

And he sealed the letter with his signet ring and handed it over to his lawyer.

Nella and Lady Vane were seated at afternoon tea as it was delivered to the latter.

"A letter from Roderick! You see he is not in London then after all," she cried, and then she opened it and began reading.

A look of incredulity and dismay gradually spread over her countenance as she read on, and at last she lay down the letter with a little gasp.

"The wretch, the dishonourable wretch! Oh! child! you were right—he—Rosalynn has thrown you over."

Nella's face flushed and then paled.

"He has thrown me over because I am going to lose my money—is that it, Aunt?" she said, in a low voice.

"He says it's because he has had great losses and is a poor man; but one can see plainly enough the real reason. Oh, my poor, dear girl, this is terrible for you. I never could have believed Rosalynn was such a monster, such a scoundrel!"

And Lady Vane began to sob bitterly.

"If he is a monster and a scoundrel," said Nella, calmly, "perhaps I am having a mercurial escape, Aunt Della. Don't cry so; give me the letter, and let me read it and judge for myself."

"Take it, take it. I don't believe half he says. It's only because—because of this suit. It can't be because he has lost everything, as he says."

Nella read the letter through slowly, with a stunned, dazed feeling; but gradually, as she read on, the truth dawned on her.

"I think I can quite understand the matter, Aunt Della," she said, with a contemptuous smile. "Lord Rosalynn, no doubt, is, as he says, a very poor man; he has had losses, as he says, and as those two men said whose conversation I overheard at the Pierpoints. Now that I am sure to be poor, to lose my all, he cannot—as those same men said he could not—afford to marry me. I often wondered why Lord Rosalynn, a man accustomed to the society of fine ladies of fashion—of women of the world—should have fixed on a quiet, country-bred girl like me for a wife; but I see his reason now. He never loved me, aunt. If he had, he could not have written this letter. He was ruined then, when he proposed to me; and it was my money that attracted him—he was only marrying me for that. Now that I am poor, therefore, he drops me on the first pretext. Oh! what an escape I have had!"

And she threw the letter disdainfully aside.

"An escape do you call it?" whispered Lady Vane. "I don't quite understand you."

"Oh, Aunt Della!" cried Nella, "to be married for—for money!"

"You would have been Lady Rosalynn; and it—if all this had not happened about your money, you'd have been rich, and in a good position. Now—"

"And I should have been an unloved wife, a—oh! Aunt Della, I should have been miserable," cried Nella. "As it is, I am mortified, humiliated, to think I have been so imposed upon, so cheated. Oh! I am thankful I have found out in time what sort of a man I was about to give myself to."

"You won't feel very thankful when you find yourself a pauper, without a husband or a penny, and everyone talking about you," retorted Lady Vane, angrily. "That dreadful Mr. Rogers, who, by the way, is your cousin, how he will laugh when he hears of this."

Nella started, and her face flushed crimson.

"I don't think Mr. Rogers will laugh," she returned. "He—he was dreadfully grieved when he learnt I was engaged to Lord Rosalynn, and told me—or began to tell me—that he thought of him, but, of course, I stopped him."

Lady Vane looked at Nella in surprise.

"Mr. Rogers! He had the impudence to mention Rosalynn to you? What did he

know of him, and why did he speak of him to you?"

"He knew of him what all the world seems to know of him but you and me, Aunt Delia," replied Nella, bitterly. "He spoke of him because I told him—because I found it necessary to tell him I was engaged to him. Mr. Rogers is far too good-hearted, too much of a gentleman to laugh when he hears of my disgrace."

"Disgrace! You use a strong term; and I did not know you had such a high opinion of Mr. Rogers, or Mr. Palliser I suppose one ought to say. By the way—" and Lady Vane stopped short, with glittering eyes.

"Yes, Aunt Delia?" returned Nella.

"Oh, nothing! When did this happen, Nella, this conversation with Mr. Rogers? You never told me about it."

"No, I told no one," she answered; "why should I? It was at Brighton, aunt, the day after I found out who Mr. Rogers was."

"What! you have seen him since?" cried Lady Vane.

"Yes, that once," answered Nella, sadly.

"And—why did he come—tell me?" said Lady Vane, coaxingly.

"To—to say how sorry he was—to assure me he did not know who I was, to—to beg that we might be friends," replied Nella, her face growing crimson again as she spoke.

"And you, what did you say?" asked Lady Vane.

"I was obliged to tell him not to come again, that I could not see him, and he has never been near us since, as you know," said Nella.

"Ah! I understand!" said Lady Vane, thoughtfully. "Fancy Mr. Rogers being your first cousin! A very charming man, I always said so."

"Yes. Well, I never thought I should ever be obliged to him for anything, Aunt Delia," answered Nella, "but, to repeat what I said before, I am obliged to him now. He has saved me from making an awful mistake."

"Perhaps," said Aunt Delia, whose head seemed to be full of some very absorbing reflection. "Where is Mr. Rogers—James Roger Palliser I should say—now?"

"You seem to take to his new name very kindly, Aunt Delia," said Nella, rather bitterly. "I do not know where my good cousin is just at this moment. In London, I conjecture; but, if you want to know, no doubt Mr. Parker can tell you."

"Ah! so he could, of course. Well, I suppose I must acknowledge this precious episode of Rossalyn's."

"I suppose so. Thank him from me for his courtesy in letting me know that he had changed his intentions regarding me, and bid him farewell on my behalf," said Nella.

"My dear Nella. I can't possibly, I really can't—" began Lady Vane.

"Well, Aunt Delia, say what you please. You can write the letter far better than I can; only make him understand that I quite acquiesce in his decision, that is all," interrupted Nella; and, turning wearily away, she left the room.

CHAPTER XV.

"DIPLOMACY!"

"ONE really never should be sure of anything," thought Lady Vane, ruefully, as she sat before her dressing-table next day preparing for her afternoon drive. "It's quite too terrible all this. The uncertainty of things! I don't think I shall ever need anyone to preach me a sermon on that again. Dear! dear! how certain it seemed a year ago that the Palliser estates were Nella's and that she was one of the richest girls in London, and now it seems as if she would presently be as poor as the poorest. Four months ago and I thought her marriage with Rossalyn would have taken place by this time, and now that's off; and I worked so hard to bring it about—

Nella never helped me at all—and to think of his behaving so shabbily after all.

"That Mr. Rogers, I wonder—I wonder whether he would have proposed to Nella that day if she'd not told him of her engagement? Odd thing he should not have known of it. I—I wonder if" (and she leant her head on her hand, and looked very grave), "I wonder if he really cared for Nella, if it is possible he cares for her still. I don't see why we should drop him even if—if—just because he is Roger Palliser's son and Jasper's heir; the poor man is only claiming his right. Nella, of course, doesn't see it in that light, she imagines he is injuring her, and, of course—well, I shan't drop him. She may be as angry as she likes, but," and a very cunning expression came into Lady Vane's fine eyes, "I mean to cultivate Mr. James Palliser whether Nella likes it or not!"

So saying, Lady Vane went downstairs, and was presently on her way to the park.

Jim Rogers, meanwhile, quite unconscious of all that had been taking place in Belgrave-square, had been passing his time very miserably, living a lonely sort of life in his crowded hotel, making no new acquaintances, and seeing no one save Mr. Howard and his partner.

London was dull and empty; he began to hate it and England, to wish with all his heart he had remained in ignorance of his claims to be a Palliser, that he had never left Australia, and, above all, that he had never met Nella.

The thoughts of her approaching marriage rendered him wretched; daily he learnt more and more of Rossalyn's past history, daily he felt more strongly how miserable her life would be as his wife.

Was there no chance of saving her? Was it possible that even without her fortune—the fortune he was claiming solely to save her from a fate he shuddered to think of—Rossalyn would still make her his wife?

He was walking through the park taking but little notice of what was going on around him, or of the few carriages that passed him, feeling very sad, anxious, and down-hearted, when a phaeton drew up close to him, and a well-remembered voice called him by name. He started, and looked up to see Lady Vane beckoning to him.

"Mr. Rogers, why have you quite dropped me?" she said, reproachfully. "Do you look on me as an enemy because of—because of the little family dispute between you and my god-daughter? Fie! fie! my dear sir," and she smiled charmingly, and very charming, very fascinating was Lady Vane's smile when she chose it to be so, "that is neither kind nor generous of you!"

"My dear Lady Vane," he cried, eagerly, "believe me—if I had imagined—thought, my presence would not have been disagreeable to you, I should have called to see you long ago; but—Miss Danvers?"

"Ah, for shame! You only think of Nella, not of me; and permit me to say, my dear Mr. Rogers, you give in to her little ways and whims too much. You must forgive her. She is quick, impetuous, unreasonable; but, I am sure, far too good-hearted and sensible to look on you as her enemy."

"Her enemy!" said poor Jim, miserably. "Heaven knows I am not that."

"No, of course not. I am quite sure of it. How ill you are looking, Mr. Rogers! you should not remain too long in town. I suppose you will be going into the country soon?"

"I—I don't know. You see this business—" began Jim.

"Of course—I forgot for the moment—it keeps you here as—as it does us," she replied, looking at him searchingly.

There was a pause.

"Is Miss Danvers—well?" he asked, timidly.

"Pretty well," returned Lady Vane. "And when will you pay me a visit, Mr. Rogers?"

"Whenever I may," he answered. "But, Lady Vane, I think I ought to tell you that—

but," and he looked with a face suddenly filled with horror at Lady Vane, for the idea flashed across him for a moment that perhaps Nella was already married, "is Miss Danvers with you still?"

"She is," replied Lady Vane, gravely.

"And will she not object to seeing me, do you think?" he asked, uneasily.

"I do not see why she should," replied her ladyship, calmly. "May I give you one word of advice, Mr. Rogers?" and she looked up at him archly.

"Of course," he answered, in surprise.

"Then let me advise you to remember how uncertain all things are in this world, and not to believe everything is sure—not even those things which you have every reason to believe certain. Do you understand?" as she looked up and met Jim's puzzled gaze. "But of course you don't, and I can't explain. But—you'll come and see me?"

Jim promised.

"Then, good-bye for the present. I am so glad I met you, Mr. Rogers."

And with a wave of her hand her ladyship drove off.

"There!" she said to herself, triumphantly, as she leant back with a well-satisfied smile in her luxurious equipage, "I've managed that very nicely. I've opened the way for Nella out of all her troubles if she will but take it. Loves her! Why, the poor fellow evidently is in despair about her. I declare the tone in which he mentioned her name was quite pathetic, and he looks quite wretched, evidently from disappointment and grief about her. As things have turned out, it was a pity she ever met that wretch Rossalyn. However, it is not too late yet!"

"What can she mean?" thought poor Jim, in a bewildered way. "I should be worse than a coward if I did not go and call on her after what she has said; but I fear Nella will be annoyed, and—I would not hurt her for the world. Heaven grant I may not meet him there. I could not bear it."

Next day Jim found himself at Lady Vane's door. He felt very odd, very strange as he mounted the broad staircase of the splendid house, and the thoughts forced itself into his mind that in very truth the house and all it contained was his—his very own.

He did not like the feeling. It made him seem an impostor somehow, and he positively blushed as he heard the powdered footman announce him in his sonorous voice as Mr. Rogers—the first time in his life that Jim had felt obliged to blush at the sound of that name.

Lady Vane was alone in the room, as Jim perceived with a mingled feeling of relief and disappointment. She received him in a very friendly manner, and bade him be seated on a small chair close to her side.

"Nella is out," she said, "and will not be back for half-an-hour. Ah! I see you are disappointed to find only poor me here; but I am glad to have a few minutes quite alone with you. I—I am a little bit of a witch, I must tell you, Mr. Rogers—a thought reader, a physiognomist, a diviner of secrets, and I believe I have guessed one of yours?"

She looked kindly yet playfully into Jim's sad face as she spoke, and suddenly there came a great yearning into his soul to unbosom himself to Lady Vane; then it passed, and his face fell.

She had noticed the look and interpreted it aright, however.

"Yes, tell me your trouble, Mr. Rogers," she said, in a low, earnest voice. "Tell me everything, and, believe me, I am your friend."

"Lady Vane," he burst out, impetuously, "I believe you can read my thoughts, that you do know my secret, I have only one in the world; but if you do—you must know how hopeless it is."

She shook her head.

"Remember what I told you yesterday," she said, with a reproving smile.

"Six weeks ago—yes, I guessed your secret

even then, Mr. Rogers, and felt so sorry for you—I might have hesitated to say what I am going to say now, but to-day I say it without scruple. If you care for Nella—

"It!" cried Jim, fervently.

"As you care for Nella, then," resumed Lady Vere, "do not despair. There is nothing to prevent your winning her in time."

"What can you mean—her—she—"

"I mean every word I say, Mr. Rogers. Do your best, you have my sincerest good wishes, and shall have all the aid I can give you. Hush! here is Nella. She must on no account imagine you and I understand each other; if she did she would never forgive me, and your chances would be ruined."

Almost as she spoke, the door opened, and Nella entered. She stopped short and her face crimsoned as she saw Jim.

He rose and stood nervously looking at her with imploring, apologetic eyes.

"Miss Danvers," he said, "I fear you are surprised—displeased to—see me here, but—"

"My dear Mr. Rogers, don't imagine so; you do her a wrong, she is not so ungenerous. Nella, I am sure you are pleased to see Mr. Rogers here once more," interrupted Lady Vere, with a look at her niece.

"Any visitor of yours has a right to come to this house, Aunt Della," replied Nella coldly; then, as she noticed the look of intense pain and mortification that spread over Jim's face, she added hurriedly: "I should be very sorry indeed if Mr. Palliser," and she laid an emphasis on the name, "kept away on my account; he—he is welcome."

"Do not call me by any name, but Rogers yet, Miss Danvers," he said, hurriedly.

"Why not? it is your name you know," she answered, calmly.

"I have to prove that yet, you see," he said.

"Ah! but we all know now that it is so, that you and I are cousins. How strange!" she added, dreamily, with her eyes fixed on Jim, and speaking as if she were talking to herself and neither to him nor Lady Vere. "How strange! my cousin! the only relation I have ever known, besides my poor old grandfather."

There was neither dislike nor anger in her voice, but rather a strange sort of satisfaction; and her glance was gentle and friendly—it thrilled through poor Jim's heart.

"Then as we are relations let us be friends too; surely that is but right," he said, entreatingly. "May we not be friends, Miss Danvers, or can you not forgive me for—"

"I have nothing to forgive, you have done me no wrong," replied Nella, wearily. "On the contrary," and she paused, hesitated, and bit her lip. "Pray never imagine that I bear you any ill will for what has, or will soon take place. Worse things might have happened to me."

"Yes, I understand, things you might have considered worse and have felt more," said poor Jim, his heart sinking.

Of course, to her, the loss of her wealth was not the greatest misfortune that she could imagine. Doubtless to her the loss of Lord Rossalyn, of his love, which of course she believed herself to possess, would be a far bitterer sorrow.

She looked at him with a puzzled expression, and, for the first time, noticed how worn and ill and haggard he looked. Had he heard of her engagement with Lord Rossalyn being at an end?

She hardly fancied it likely he had. His visit must have been dictated by merely friendly feeling—a wish, notwithstanding all complications and mistakes and disagreements, to stand on good terms with the only relative he had in the world, and with whom, but a short time ago, he had been on a footing of intimacy.

Surely it would be best to meet his en-

deavours at friendliness half way, put the past out of mind, and treat him kindly.

So the visit passed off with far less of constraint on either side than Jim had feared. Once or twice, indeed, Nella was so like the Nella of former days, that he forgot for an instant all that had occurred to separate them; forgot the Palliser property, forgot Rossalyn, and was fain to believe that she, for the time, had forgotten also.

At last the visit came to an end; and Jim, when he glanced at the clock, was ashamed to perceive to what a length it had extended, and rose hurriedly to bid Lady Vere and Nella farewell.

Her ladyship pressed his hand warmly.

"You will come and see us again soon?" she said, graciously, with a smile and a nod that said, as plainly as words could have, that she was anxious for him to do so, and pleased with the way things were going; and, Nella, as she shook hands with him, smiled kindly, and looked, or so he thought, as if in her heart she seconded her aunt's invitation.

"And yet," he thought, when he got back to his hotel, and his excitement began to subside, "what is the use of my going there? What is the good of my seeing her, when she is engaged to that fellow Rossalyn? Every time I see her I love her more and more. I am a fool to go near her; and my plan to save her has evidently failed utterly. He will marry her in spite of all."

"Quite like old times, seeing Mr. Rogers here again," said Lady Vere, gently, a minute or two after Jim left; during which time she was aware Nella had been regarding her fixedly. "He is a delightful man. I see the very likeness to the Palliser family distinctly now."

"Do you?" said Nella, and then she burst out impetuously. "Aunt Della, why—oh! why did you bring him here?" and burst into tears.

Lady Vere looked at her with a queer, victorious twinkle in her eyes.

"My dear child, what makes you think I brought him here?" she said, kindly.

"Because I feel certain he would not have come otherwise," replied Nella. "Didn't you understand why I told him at Brighton I was engaged, Aunt Della? It was because he said he loved me."

"Well, my dear, and pray what difference does that make?" returned Lady Vere, calmly.

(To be continued.)

A FEW years ago it was suspected that the latitude of places on the earth's surface changes. A number of astronomers agreed to make observations for two years, and the result has just been made public. Latitudes do change. Berlin, for example, was fifty feet nearer the north pole in September than it was in March. This change is not, of course, a shifting of any one point on the earth's surface. It is a tilting of the axis of the earth.

A SCIENTIFIC writer says sleep, if taken at the right moment, will prevent an attack of nervous headache. If the subjects of such headache will watch the symptoms of its coming, they can notice that it begins with a feeling of weariness and heaviness. This is the time that a sleep of an hour or two, as nature guides, will effectually prevent the headache. If not taken just then it will be too late, for after the attack is fairly under way it is impossible to get sleep until far into the night perhaps. It is so common in these days for doctors to forbid having their patients roused to take medicine if they are asleep when the hour comes round, that the people have learned the lesson pretty well, and they generally know that sleep is better for the sick than medicine. But it is not well known that sleep is a wonderful preventive of disease—better than tonic regulators and stimulants.

PRETTY PENELOPE.

CHAPTER V.

WHATEVER pain and foreshadowing of coming anguish might lie in Penelope Desborough's young heart, there was no trace of it on her face or about her person as she flew down the hotel stairs at her usual breakneck pace and danced into the sitting-room.

Denis Latimer was standing before the fire stirring it into a blaze; August as it was, the damp and cold weather made it imperative that Mrs. Desborough should have the fire.

Her chair was drawn close up to the blaze, and when he laid aside the poker Denis stooped to tuck the light rug more carefully about her feet.

The invalid's eyes filled with tears, and she touched his strong, sun-burnt hand for a moment with her delicate fingers.

"How good you are, Denis. I am afraid I shall never be able to express my full gratitude to you, my dear, never!"

He smiled at her faintly. His colour had changed a little as Penelope had come in; she had perched herself in her favourite attitude on the edge of the table, and was laughing in her low, musical laughter at the antics of a struggling kitten she had picked up outside the door.

"And you must go to-morrow," Mrs. Desborough said, regretfully. "Well, we must not be selfish; but, Pen, have you heard the bad news, Denis leaves us to-morrow? What shall we do without him?"

Penelope held the kitten aloft and surveyed it critically. It was not at all a pleasant attitude, and the kitten expressed opinion on the same by a series of pitiful mew, and a few abortive attempts to dig its claws into the slender white wrists below them.

"Well," Penelope said, with a laugh, "you will cry, and Lucie will look pensive, and Walter will heave a sigh of relief, for honestly I fancy he is a little jealous of Denis; and the hotel people will be very sorry, and the waiters will offer up prayers for his speedy return, and I—well," Penelope swung her unfortunate kitten to and fro rather relentlessly, "well, I shall be dreadfully bored for about an hour or," reflectively, "perhaps two, and then," very cheerfully, "I shall forget all about him!"

"You are candid at any rate," Denis said, with a laugh that had not much amusement in it.

Penelope laughed back.

"I always tell the truth, don't I, mumsy dear? It is one of my many faults!"

Mrs. Desborough smiled faintly at her baby's nonsense. During the week that had gone she and Lucie had grown quite accustomed to the sparring that went on so perpetually between Penelope and Mr. Latimer.

Not that Penelope was more pugnacious with Denis than with anyone else; as she had said to Lucie she intended to treat him exactly as she treated everybody else; and she had carried out this arrangement to the letter, thereby causing Lucie almost to forget that burst of passionate objection to Denis Latimer's generous friendship which had come with so much surprise upon the elder sister.

Mrs. Desborough had taken an early opportunity to say something in her gentle, sweet way to Denis on the subject of Penelope.

"You must please forgive my baby for her saucy ways. I am afraid her little tongue will get her into mischief one of these days. I must try and curb her I suppose now," and then the mother had sighed. "It seems so hard to begin preaching and making strict lines for what, after all, is simple innocence and nature. Still—"

Denis had broken in quickly.

"Do nothing to change her, dear friend," he said, and he spoke earnestly. "She is, as you say, only a baby; but I know a good many babies of her age who in worldly knowledge and

tauties might easily be her mother. Keep her young and fresh and natural as long as you can."

Denis had spoken warmly, and with sincere admiration. He had been enchanted with the girl from the very first, and found her little imperfections and her high spirits and merry laughter the prettiest things in the world.

"I think my mother would have been proud of her godchild," he said, after he had first met Penelope.

Mrs. Desborough smiled and sighed too. "Madam always predicted Pen would be pretty," she answered; "but I fancy she would have been almost a greater favourite with your father, Denis; he adored her as a baby."

There was no subject so pleasing to the invalid as a discussion about her lovely young daughter.

Somehow her sufferings seemed to grow less when the sunshine of Penelope's daily presence came into her life.

The girl was in danger of being spoiled by her mother and sister when her visit to London took place, and the somewhat chilling surroundings at Rutland Gate had not been altogether unwholesome in their effect.

Still it would take a good deal to spoil Penelope, she was of the nature that can resist the world and its pernicious influences.

Beneath her merry laughter and childish ways there ran a stream of deep pure thought, a character that would develop itself and make itself manifest when occasion demanded it.

Penelope had managed her plot with regard to herself and Denis Latimer well, though not without some difficulty; she had found it hard to refrain from doing some one of the many little acts of tenderness her invalid mother's helplessness required, and her heart revelled in doing; she had to give vent to her great love and pity by stealth as it were, and she had to deceive Lucie and her mother as well as Denis, for she was afraid they might read beneath the surface if she were not careful, guess her intention, and through her love and pride in her frustrate her determination to let Denis Latimer imagine her, exactly the creature she was not.

All this she had thought out as she had lain awake in her little bed on the night Denis had returned to Waverton with that very feeble excuse about his yacht on his lips, and his real reason gleaming out of his handsome eyes as they met her blue ones.

She knew she need have very little fear of her mother reading her secret, but Lucie's calm nature had been roused by that fiery outburst of hers, and Penelope felt that her sister would possibly understand all unless she were very clever; she determined upon doing things boldly.

"Mumsey," she declared to her mother the next morning, "if I am horribly, awfully selfish this week—if I seem to neglect you, and run about like a wild thing, you must put it all down to the effect of the sea, for now I think I go 'kind of mad,' as the Americans say, when I get near the sea; so"—with a series of soft kisses on Mrs. Desborough's delicate cheek—"if your baby seems forgetful and selfish, why you will understand, and—"

Mrs. Desborough had drawn the lovely face down on her heart. They were alone in her bedroom. Penelope had carried in the dainty breakfast.

"My baby is never selfish or neglectful—she is the best baby in the world," she said, softly. "She is my treasure, my sweet comfort, my sunshine."

And, indeed, Penelope tried to be an actual comfort to her mother. There was nothing she did not do. Her mother was her one thought. Night after night she had sat beside Mrs. Desborough's bed, refusing to go to sleep, clinging with her hand to her dear invalid's cold feeble one, and praying that the pain might cease or be transferred to her own strong frame.

Mrs. Desborough had spoken in gentle loving terms of the goodness of both her chil-

dren to Denis when he had paid her his first visit after his return to his childhood's home.

"Though I am a sufferer in some ways, I am blessed beyond measure in others," she had said. "I have my dear Lucie, who has been my more than daughter—now I have my baby, my pretty Penelope! I am to be envied I think, not pined, Denis."

Denis was thinking of these words now as he stood with his back to the fireplace, and his eyes sombre and sorrowful, fixed on the lovely lithe figure perched in its pink gown on the table, the dainty little hands occupied in tormenting the kitten beyond all bounds.

Denis grew angry as he stood there; the girl's flushed beautiful face laughing mockingly at the poor little animal that was enduring such discomfort, if not pain, at her hands, brought a feeling of something like disgust for her wanton cruelty, and contempt at his own weakness, into his heart.

He moved suddenly from his place and encircled her wrist with his strong fingers.

"You have tormented this poor creature enough; let it go," he said, very quietly.

Penelope looked at him; her lips were still smiling, but she had turned pale.

"Are you my master, Mr. Latimer?" she inquired, coolly, not releasing hold one little bit.

Denis answered "Yes," quite calmly. "As I would be master over anyone whom I found indulging in cruelty to a dumb animal, simply for wanton amusement," he added.

He spoke so low that Mrs. Desborough did not hear him. Penelope's smile lingered, and her eyes never dropped from his.

"Take your hand away, Denis. I am going to release my prisoner. What a funny man you are to be sure! You are always so much in earnest, you should have been a parson."

She spoke still in the same laughing, musical way. Was it impossible, flashed the thought through Denis's mind, to touch any deeper chord in this girl's nature? Except when her vanity was hurt, she never ceased to smile, and to sparkle and dance. Was she utterly empty and worthless? Was she nothing but this bright, glittering bubble of a creature? He remembered her mother's proud belief in her "baby," and he shivered suddenly.

His heart was heavy in his breast, and a sort of rebellious flood rose in his mind. Why was she made so fair? why did so clear, so honest, so truthful a beauty shine out of those big blue eyes? What mockery was it that gave her so apparently pure and simple and unadorned a nature when all the time she was a sham—a being without heart, selfish, cruel, vain, mercenary, unworthy?

Penelope sprang suddenly from her table, and let the kitten drop to the floor, almost roughly.

"You have a very bad habit of glaring at people, Denis," she said, lightly; "did no one ever tell you so before? Dear me! how your education has been neglected! There are so many things you need to learn."

"Pen!" Mrs. Desborough said, smiling with slight reproof at her child. Denis had turned and walked back to the fire; he was not a good actor, and his face betrayed something of his thoughts, even to Mrs. Desborough's unsuspecting eyes. "She hastened to chase away what she imagined was annoyance at Penelope's nonsense."

"I think if it comes to a question of education, my lady Penelope," she said, "that you will come off worst. What will you say, pray, if you find yourself doomed to another year of schooling, eh?"

Penelope saw her mother was a little anxious about Denis, and she determined to rouse him from the sombre mood into which he had fallen before he betrayed himself farther. Her heart was cold in her breast, but her courage did not desert her; and if her laughter was a little forced, and her colour a little faded it was unnoticed. She went up to him and slipped her hand through his arm in the familiar semi-affectionate way she had done many times during the past week.

"Denis, I appeal to you for protection. Do you hear what mother is saying? You won't let me go back to school, will you, Denis dear? You will be my champion, and see that I am kept from all tyranny and horrible things?"

"Not much fear of anything horrible coming to you, Miss Pen," cried Walter Collier, who came in with his *fiancée* Lucie at this very moment. "What has she been doing, Latimer, something worse than usual? Are we never to get to the end of your tricks, Penelope? I thought we all knew you by this time, but you have always got a surprise ready somewhere."

Penelope, clinging to Denis's arm, only made a "moue" at her future brother-in-law; and as Lucie began to speak to her mother about some little matter, Penelope drew Denis away to a farther window.

"So you are going to leave us to-morrow? You know, I think I am a little sorry, just a little, Denis."

"You are very kind," he answered, coldly. Her playfulness, her laughter hurt him to-night as though they gave him actual physical pain.

"I hope you are sorry to go, though, of course, you are going to please yourself. That is the best of being a man—a man can do just everything he wants whenever he pleases." Penelope had released her hold on his arm, and had propped herself up against the same window that had so very nearly worked destruction to her dainty nose earlier in the day. She spoke with an accent of sly and reflection. "How I wish I were a man!" she finished.

Denis looked at her steadily, took in the full, exquisite beauty of the face, the glory of her eyes, and his heart thrilled as he gazed. With such a semblance of truth before him certainty gave way to doubt, despair to hope. What if he had after all judged too hastily? what if he had been wrong?

"Penelope," he said, suddenly and hurriedly, "why do you say such things, dear? Why do you try and traduce yourself?"

Penelope coloured faintly. "Oh!" she answered, as hurriedly, "I know it is supposed to be a horrible thing for a girl to wish to be a man; but, after all, I don't see where is the harm—all the world can wish for something they would like, can't they, Denis?"

"I was not blaming you for wishing to change your sex, though." He did not speak the honest admiration he felt. "I—I only meant I do not like to hear you always desiring more self—as it were. If you said you wished to be a man because of a man's greater strength, of the possibilities of grand things that lie in a man's path, I—"

Penelope twisted herself round in that way which was so peculiarly her own.

"As if I cared a fig about those sort of things! How you do prose, Denis. You really ought to have been a parson. You are much more like one than Mr. De Burgh. I want to be a man because a man has so much more fun and freedom. Life and its pleasures are made for men. We women come in a very poor second. All the same," the girl said, with a short, hard laugh that was born of her intense mental suffering, but which rang with a very different meaning in Denis Latimer's ears. "All the same, I mean to have a good time, woman though I am, before my life ends!"

She saw his face change, she saw him wince. She had been quick to note the generous eagerness with which he had given her a chance to re-establish herself in his opinion.

Penelope never knew until this moment how hard was the rôle she had set herself to play, how bitter the task. Calling up all her courage and strength she spoke more recklessly and foolishly than she had yet done, and even as the words left her lips she knew the bolts were shot this time for good. (Closes)

what may, she had lost Denis Latimar for ever.

There was a moment's silence before she spoke. Denis could not speak. The absolute conviction of his worst fears was a final blow that was crushing and horrible.

Penelope chatted on as well as she could.

"And, of course, you will see Aunt Julia and Marcia. You will say you have seen us all, and they will ask you no end of questions about us. Come, Denis, confess. What sort of characters will you give us all? Do tell me, I am so curious."

"You come to a strange person for your character, Penelope," he said.

"Well, I dare say you know it as well as most people," she answered, calmly. "Now then, about mamma, what will you say? That she is an angel, of course. Yes, I see it in your eyes. Of Uncle? One of the most gentle and charming women you have ever met. Of Penelope? Well, she shrugged her shoulders, "a girl with some pretensions to good looks. I may say that, Denis, I suppose—may I not?" with a glance upwards out of her deep blue eyes. "You won't refuse to say that much. It will vex—"

Denis turned on her swiftly; he lost even his courtesy in his rage and pain.

"If I give you your true character, Penelope, I shall say you are what, unfortunately, I have proved you to be—a contemptible coquette, unworthy a moment's thought when compared with your gentle mother and sister, or, indeed, with anyone who claims to be a woman with a heart. You are, indeed, a novel experience for me—one that occasions me both disgust and regret!"

Too voice ceased suddenly. Without another word, another look at the pretty, pink-robed figure, Denis moved away and went back to the fire and to Mrs. Desborough.

He noticed that Penelope stood for a long time by the window; but if he had flattered himself that she was grieving at his words, her demeanour and her voice when she rejoined the others would have disillusioned him.

She was exactly as she always was; and a great bitterness rose in the young man's mind against her.

If she had shed a tear—albeit, an angry one—he would have felt a softening towards her; but her absolute indifference, her nonchalance to his speech, deepened her sin in his eyes.

"She is worthless, worthless! I am only wasting my time. It is trying to break a butterfly on a wheel," and then a pang went through him as he conjured up the pain that this soulless creature would in all probability cause her devoted mother, and his love was lost in his anger. "She is worthless!" he repeated over and over to himself. But through all and with all there ran that regret that would not be stilled. "Would to Heaven I had never seen her! would to Heaven we had never met!"

CHAPTER VI.

DENIS LATIMAR did not go to Cowes. He felt in the very last mood to meet a fashionable throng when he went away from Weymouth.

With the variability so utterly uncharacteristic of anything British, and yet so customary, the weather shone out brilliantly on the day of his departure.

The sunshine was, for almost the first time in his life, distasteful to Denis. The sombre grey of the day before, the sullen sea and sky, the pouring rain, would have been in complete harmony with his mood; but the sudden burst of heat and life that rushed through his open window, the sparkle and shimmer of the sea that danced and rippled, where yesterday it had waved and heaved, the deep blue of the sky mingling with the deeper colour of the far distant line of coast, gave the young man's troubled mind no room for pleasure—nothing,

in fact, but annoyance and a vague feeling of anger.

The day recalled Penelope too vividly.

"She has her August this morning, at any rate," he said to himself as he dressed; and then he wondered, with a little excitement in his heart, if she would show him any resentment for his very rude speech of the night before.

It had come upon him in the sleepless hours he had endured that he had not only been rude, but cruel.

After all, what had the girl done? She was true to her nature. If her nature were so poor and sorry a thing, was she not to be pitied rather than blamed?

Denis was certainly in a very unsatisfactory state of mind. He spoke sharply to his valet—an unprecedented event—he was irritable, sullen at the same time.

He longed to see Penelope once more; though he had determined so resolutely on putting an effectual barrier of absence and distance between himself and her, this longing would come.

He had no ulterior motive for wishing it other than a desire to feast his eyes once more on her loveliness, to take away with him a final picture of the girl whom, though he told himself he despised and scorned, yet who was—alas! he knew it too well—the one creature that made life worth living to him.

He was not fated to see Penelope. As he said farewell to Mrs. Desborough, being permitted an entrance into her bedroom, and saying many tender things in the gentle voice he always used for her, Lucie gave him a "good-bye" message from her sister.

"Pen has gone bathing. She was off with Margaret this morning at an unearthly hour. They are to row to—mentioning a part of the coast some few miles off. Pen has discovered some marvellous pool, a magnificent place for diving and swimming. She sent you her love, and hoped you would forgive her."

Denis said "of course," in the most matter of fact way; but this last disappointment hurt him very much.

He roused himself to speak to Mrs. Desborough, and assure her of Penelope's safety, though he found himself echoing the mother's wish that the girl would not do these adventurous things.

Despite the fact that Denis congratulated himself loudly on having escaped the danger of losing his head and heart to this worthless, pretty Penelope, he found himself dwelling on her, and hankering after brilliant worthlessness in a manner which boded ill for his future.

He telegraphed to his yacht to come to Southampton; and he spent the hours necessary for this passage to take place in London. Having nothing else to do, it was only natural he should remember some wishes of Mrs. Desborough's uttered in an unguarded moment before him, and set himself the task of gratifying them.

He was standing on the kerbstone, debating where he should tell his cab to drive when this was done, just as another hansom pulled up, and two women's faces smiled at him, and two women's eager voices greeted him.

"Mr. Latimar! how delightful. Is it possible you are in town in August? How pleasant to see someone one knows. How horrible the streets look, so deserted; and what funny people walking about arm in arm!"

Denis shook hands warmly with Mrs. Rochdale, and with her handsome daughter. He explained his position.

"I go down to Southampton to-night," he said; and then, of course, there were explanations on the other side.

"You behold us two rather desolate people, Mr. Latimar," Mrs. Rochdale said, with her own smile.

She was a well-preserved woman, bearing only the faintest resemblance to her sister,

Mrs. Desborough; and so aided by judicious art, as to seem from the distance very much younger than she had any right to be. Her eyes had a touch of the blue in them that shone out so magnificent in those two orbs of Penelope.

It gave Denis an odd, cold feeling of horror to recognise this; for, truth to tell, Mrs. Rochdale and the women of her stamp did not commend themselves very highly in his estimation. In fact, neither of the two before him inspired him with much admiration or respect, though he disliked Marcia considerably less than her mother, and in fact had a little feeling of pity for her; misled by the girl's stately bearing and quiet manner, which he imagined to be pride, but which was in reality intense egoism.

Mrs. Rochdale went on with her explanation. It appeared a relation of her husband's, a second cousin or something, had chosen this most inauspicious moment to take his departure out of this world of pain and trouble.

"My husband is executor to the will. We were of course obliged to leave Cowes, where, by the way, you are much missed, Mr. Latimar, and come to town for some mourning. The whole of our plans are in fact *boulevard* by this regrettable affair, as it was to the house of this very cousin in Scotland to whom we were going when we left Cowes, and now—"

"And now," Marcia said, in the straightforward way which she cultivated as being effective in contradiction to her mother's artificial manner, and which she felt was effective with Denis Latimar; "and now we don't know where to go or what to do exactly. It is rather tiresome, isn't it?"

Denis agreed it was very tiresome.

"And what are you doing—are you not going to join the squadron? You said something about Southampton. I hope, Mr. Latimar, you are not contemplating another year's *ortise*."

Mrs. Rochdale was indeed most sincere in this hope.

Denis laughed not very mirthfully.

"To tell you the honest truth, Mrs. Rochdale, the thought is a very tempting one. You know I am not a fashionable person at heart."

Marcia's keen eyes and ears were all alert.

"Something has happened to him. He is changed—he looks worried—can he be in love? Where has he been? There is evidently something wrong."

She was astonished to find what a sudden difference this mere thought made in herself. Marcia was not in the least accustomed to feel discomfort or trouble.

She was physically a giant of strength and health, and, as a heart had been somehow omitted in her construction, she was able to survey life as a rule with the calm judgment of a philosopher.

She was by no means in a philosophical frame of mind at this moment. It came upon her with a heavy thud that the mere suspicion of Denis Latimar being in love was one that was pre-eminently disagreeable to her, and provocative of peculiarly disagreeable feelings.

There was a tinge of colour in her cheeks, and her eyes had a look of earnestness in them as she said, involuntarily,—

"Oh! Mr. Latimar, how I envy you!"

"Marcia!" Mrs. Rochdale gave a little cry of horror. "You can't really mean you would care to travel by sea for a year?"

No lecture of the Inquisition could have been more terrible than such a cruise to Mrs. Rochdale.

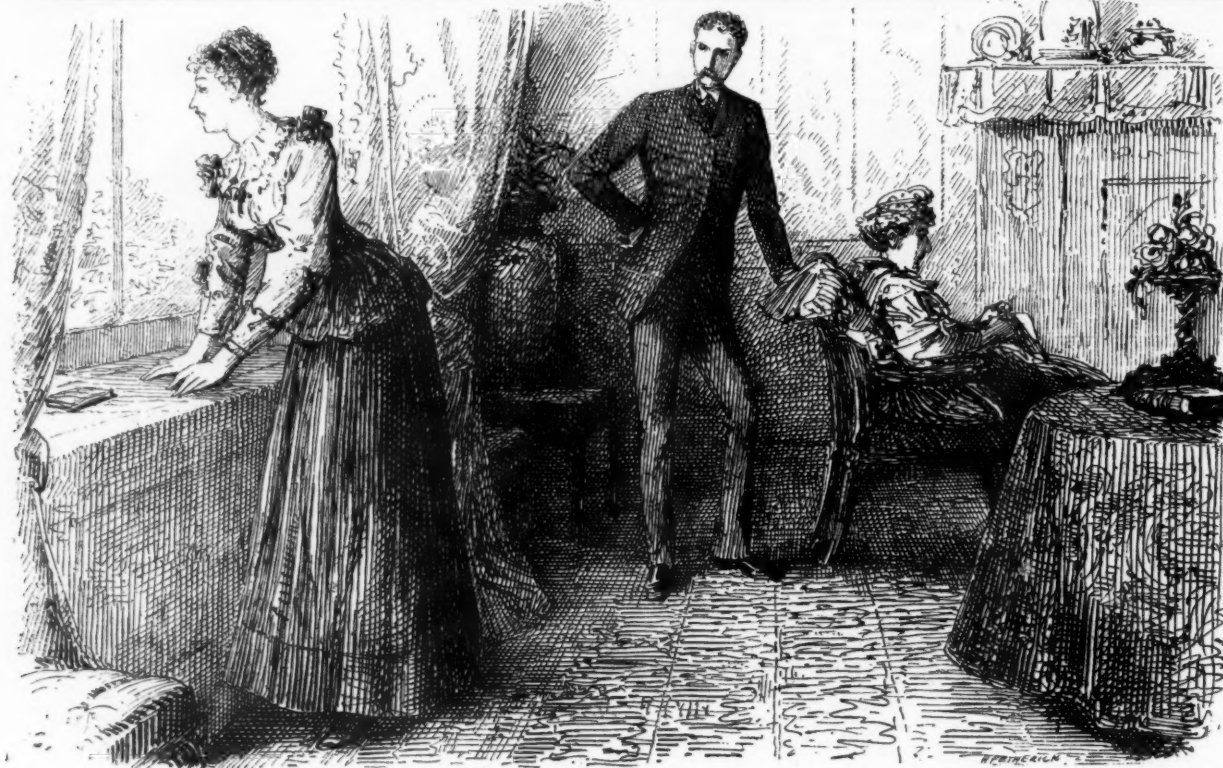
"You are fond of the sea?" Denis asked.

"Very," was Marcia's quietly emphatic reply.

She was not one of those girls who fly to extreme adjectives at every other second.

She considered "awfully" and "fearfully," and all such words as slightly vulgar, and not suited to her particular style.

"What a pity I can't induce Mrs. Roch-



[PERELOPE STOOD LOOKING OUT AT THE WINDOW, IRRITATING DENIS WITH ABSOLUTE INDIFFERENCE.]

dale to have a more lenient view of the ocean," Denis said, with a momentary smile.

Mrs. Rochdale shivered, and was about to break forth into one of her usual complaints about the horrors of the sea as provided for her own delectation, when the slightest pressure in the world from Marcia's well-gloved hand stayed her tongue, and set her maternal wits on their keenest edge.

"And so you have not decided on your next move?" the young man said, more for talking than for any real interest in the matter. Of course you are not going to stay in town?" Mrs. Rochdale nearly jumped out of the hansom.

"Oh! Mr. Latimar!" she laughed. "Well, no, not quite so bad as that. Oh! I expect we shall have to make our way down to Eastbourne or Folkestone, or some equally objectionable English watering place. Mr. Rochdale does not wish us to go abroad this year."

An absolutely unvarnished statement, since Mr. Rochdale never was permitted much of a voice in such matters.

Denis was looking at Marcia. She, in her turn, was gazing with rather a pathetic expression on her face, at a blind man who was passing along, led by a dog, and tapping the pavement as he went.

Marcia was perfectly aware that Denis's grey eyes were watching her; but she was a skilled actress, and she managed to seem perfectly oblivious and far away in a sort of day-dream, that was a kind of testimony to the depth and greatness of the mind enshrined in her handsome proud body.

Denis felt something nearer akin to sympathy for Marcia Rochdale at this moment than he had ever yet done, and the feeling of pity her manner had already inspired deepened and strengthened.

He pictured the sort of life the girl would have to lead with such a mother, and he was extremely sorry for her.

He spoke in this moment of interest, sym-

pathy and pity, words which under ordinary circumstances he would never have uttered.

Marcia little knew how much she was indebted, indirectly it is true, but indebted all the same, to her Cousin Penelope for the events which followed.

Had not Denis Latimar been in such a depressed, unhappy condition of mind, he would never have been turned to sympathise so strongly with one who, on the face of it, really seemed to deserve little sympathy.

It was the shadow in his own heart that made him sorry for the imaginary shadow in Marcia's, and so in this moment he unconsciously laid the foundation-stone of a fabric of events which was to cost him dear.

"I wonder if I could persuade you to come to Southampton. The town is a pretty, quaint old place, and the hotel not at all bad, and then we can have little cruises round about in the yacht, which I shall undertake to assure Mr. Rochdale shall be fraught with no danger whatsoever, and be accomplished only in the finest weather. It seems to me you might find it pleasant for a week or so; but," with a hastiness which showed Denis's ignorance of the world, "please do not hesitate to say 'no' if you would rather not come."

Mrs. Rochdale was a consummate actress, and Marcia, if possible, excelled her mother. Had they rehearsed this scene a hundred times it could not have gone better.

"You are really very, very, very kind, Mr. Latimar, I scarcely know what to say," Mrs. Rochdale began, when her daughter broke in hurriedly, excitedly,—

"Oh! mother dear!" was all she said; but there was a world of eager entreaty in it. Denis suddenly became aware of the fact that Marcia Rochdale, when animated and interested, was undoubtedly handsome and rather attractive.

"You must say 'yes,' Mrs. Rochdale," he said, desiring to give Marcia the pleasure she wanted so much.

He felt the shadow in his breast shift a

little as the matter was discussed and arranged, and he received Marcia's quiet thanks.

It was certainly pleasant to have done even a little for someone else, and took him away from his thoughts of Penelope, which were so bitter-sweet and so persistent. When he finally jumped into his hansom it was settled that the Rochdales were to join the *Luna* in two days' time, and he immediately set to work to secure a couple of men to complete the party.

Mrs. Rochdale looked curiously at her daughter as they drove away.

"Well, Marcia, I congratulate you," she said. "Nothing could have been better than this. Admirable! admirable!"

Marcia sank back into her corner of the cab languidly.

"Don't congratulate too soon, mamma," she answered. "After all, we have only secured an agreeable invitation."

"Which we must make the most of," Mrs. Rochdale said, softly.

Marcia replied nothing; she was thinking had this invitation been given a fortnight ago her heart would have beat high with elation; but a fortnight ago Denis Latimar had not worn the look he had worn this day, and with an uneasy conviction that something of strong import had come into the young man's thoughts, if not his life, Marcia's delight and triumph in this moment was robbed of its splendour.

Still, she was very clever, and she was very ambitious; and though she chose to adopt a languid tone to her mother, she was none the less determined to make, indeed, the most of the chance fate had put so unexpectedly in her way.

(To be continued.)

CORAL was made use of by the Romans as a protection against the evil eye, and popular superstition had credited the topaz with the power of depriving boiling water of its heat.



["PROFESSION!" SNEERED KATE.

"YOU SAY PROFESSION ADVISEDLY, FOR YOU ARE AN UTTER AND COMPLETE SHAM!"

LOYAL HEARTS AND TRUE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

It was a matter of great surprise to the worthy people of Stillbrook when an engagement was announced between their vicar, Clement Dane, and Alice, only child of Doctor Armstrong, a retired physician. Alice was an extremely pretty girl of eighteen, the happiest, merriest creature imaginable; the vicar had seen thirty years, and was grave beyond his age. In fact, he had been an object of pity to many of his people, his being a face with a story, and they were not wrong when they decided that story was a sad one.

Until he and Alice became all in all to each other, the cloud never left his pale, worn face, his eyes were full of a settled melancholy, and it seemed strange that so light-hearted a lass should prefer him to all her other suitors. Still, if both she and her father were satisfied, nothing else mattered; so the good people of the town accepted the fact, and presently regarded it quite as a natural thing. Then, too, Clement Dane was so evidently happy that they rejoiced in his good fortune, for there was scarcely one parishioner whom he had not served in some capacity, or comforted under some heavy affliction, and his marriage was looked forward to with eager and affectionate interest.

It was a sultry July morning, and on the rather primitive bridge which spanned the river stood Alice and her lover. She had removed her hat, and the gentle breeze stirred the clustering chestnut ringlets about a brow as smooth and innocent as a child's; her limpid grey eyes were full of that deep content which comes only with satisfied love, and her pretty lips were parted in a smile. Clement

placed a caressing hand upon the little head which scarcely reached his shoulder.

"Little one! little one!" he said, softly, "I wonder often what you found in me to love. I am so much older than you—"

She stayed his words by placing a minute hand over his mouth.

"Is it my fault?" she questioned, with pretty pettishness, "that I am young? I grow older every day, and when we are married"—this in a low voice—"I will wear caps like Maggie's if you wish it, if you think they will lend dignity and age to me."

He smiled indulgently down upon her. "I would not have you other than your own bright self, the sweetest and dearest little girl that ever was sent to bless a weary man's life. To lose you now would be worse than death."

Silence a moment, whilst overhead the trees glimmered golden green in the bright sunshine, and the clear stream rippled along its way; then the girl said,—

"And only death could take me from you. Yesterday when we sang my favourite hymn, 'O Paradise! O Paradise,' I could not help thinking of you each time the refrain was repeated, 'Loyal hearts and true,' and ours, dear Clement, must always be true."

She was leaning on the handrail now, her little fingers loosely clasped, her eyes full of dreamy thought.

"I am glad you know all about me," she said, breaking the heavy sweet silence, "that my life lies before you like an open book, that no secret of mine can ever mar our mutual love and trust."

Clement Dane started, winced, and grew a little paler than was his wont; then he answered her in a low voice,—

"Suppose I should tell you I had a heavy secret which I must bear with me to the grave, what then?"

"I should not be afraid. I should know that you had some good reason for hiding it away even from me, because I feel, that even were

it a disgraceful secret, the disgrace did not attach to you. Oh, I know you better than you do yourself,"—giving him her hand confidently—"and nothing could shake my faith in you."

"God bless you for your trust," and his voice, though so low and level, was full of passion. "It makes me very humble to remember, that I, even I, have won the priceless gift of your dear love."

She hid her face a moment upon his breast; then a lark, springing up to the clear blue vault, gave forth such wondrous melody that she lifted her head suddenly, and smiling up at her lover, said,—

"You are a very foolish boy indeed, so to idealise me! You don't know yet how very ignorant I am, how much I have to learn, before I can become the model vicar's wife; or how many prejudices I must conquer before I can take pleasure in district visiting, Dorcas meetings, and sewing classes. I am terribly afraid that I shall disappoint you, and I am quite sure Maggie" (his housekeeper) "will have a profound scorn for my housewifery acquirements. Dare you face such a dreadful state of affairs?" and here she laughed so softly, yet so merrily, that Clement brought her closer to his side saying,—

"I want Alice as she is."

"With all her faults and imperfections on her head!" she paraphrased lightly. "Oh! poor Clement, their name is legion!" Then her mood changed again with a swiftness that would have startled those who did not know her well. "Sometimes I am afraid that I shall disappoint you; that you will find me nothing but a spoiled child. In all my life I have never had a sorrow; mamma died before I knew her, and papa has always been so indulgent that I have never had an ungratified wish—if trouble came to me it would kill me."

"No," said Clement with conviction, "you think so, but I know you better; and not in the least thing would I have you changed."

You have brought sunshine into a life that for years dragged on in darkness, and, with Heaven's help, I will repay my debt through all the days granted to me."

He stooped then to kiss her; a month hence she would be his wife—his only and for ever, and in his heart he prayed that he might make her happiness his first thought and care, that never through fault of his should her bright face lose its brightness, her joyous eyes their radiance.

Alas, alas! how little he guessed what a terrible cloud was even then overhanging them; what pain and anguish of heart each must suffer before they met again. They were in Lowe's Land to-day, and he gave himself up to the capture he had never dared hope would come into his darkened life.

He bent over her, whispering such words as lovers use, and she listened with drooping head and flushing cheeks, believing in her innocent heart that this man was the greatest and noblest upon earth, thanking Heaven for the love and reverence he gave her. They loitered long upon the bridge, until the church bell striking warned Alice that her father would be waiting luncheon.

"I ought to be ashamed of myself," she said, laughing, "to neglect him, and all for you; now we must make most indecent haste homewards—and oh, it is so hot!"

"Too hot for great heats," Clement said, possessing himself of her arm, "and Dr. Armstrong is the most mild and malicious of men in his own household. I shrewdly suspect he stands in awe of a certain young lady named Alice."

"Oh, there's not enough of dignity in me to frighten a mouse," rejoined the girl, "no one respects me—really, Clement, your taste must be perverted."

"Stop, just a moment, lift your face to mine, little darling—so! Oh," as her beautiful innocent eyes met his,—"Oh, Alice! if only you could guess all that you are to me—all that you have done for me!"

"I know that you love me, and that is enough," she whispered back, and there under the flowering dimes they kissed each other with a solemnity that, though unfelt by them, held all the promise of woe. Then they went quietly homewards, Clement leaving the girl at her own door.

"No," he said, "I won't come in; I have such a pile of work to do before to-night; I want to get up some notes for tomorrow's lecture, and to revise my last pamphlet; but you may expect me about eight. Good-bye, love of my heart. I will not say think of me, because I know I am never absent from your thoughts."

"Good-bye, dear Clement," and her eyes followed him with love as he went away, her lips breathed a prayer for him, and with a smile still lighting up her mobile face she entered the house, dreaming nothing of the heavy anguish which to-night would befall her. Dr. Armstrong looked up as she slipped into her seat.

"Do you care, I wonder," he said, with mock reproach, "that I am literally starving? Luncheon was announced exactly half an hour ago, and I had the forbearance to wait for you!"

"What a trial of patience," laughed Alice, "Poor papa, how cruelly you must have suffered," and then she leaned a little nearer to kiss him. "You'll forgive me this once—only this once—if I promise never to trespass in like manner again."

"I have discovered your promises to be of little worth; that fellow Dane has a deteriorating effect upon you. I must remonstrate with him."

"I would not advise that," said Alice anxiously, "he might prove resistive. Oh, I can assure you he is occasionally very violent, and does not like to be lectured, and, reflect, papa, how ignorant you are of the art of defence."

Doctor Armstrong fixed his eyes morrally upon the piquante face.

"This is the result of over-indulgence," he remarked, pathetically; "would that all parents would take warning by me! Some vent, if you please, my dear, and don't forget the stuffing;" and then they laughed out of the lightness of their hearts, and Alice told of her future with blushing cheeks, and eyes which shone happily for all their tears.

She told of Clement's goodness, of his promise never to separate her from her dear and honoured father, how their home was to be his, as their love must always be.

"And," she added, perching herself upon the doctor's knee, "I shall rule you both with a rod of iron. I shall be such an awful martinet, that you won't dare to question my will, or rebel against my authority."

"My dear, have we ever dared to do that? You are tyrant of our little court."

Up at the Vicarage, Maggie had spread her master's lunch, but he took only a biscuit and a little weak wine, saying he was too busy to eat.

"Humph!" retorted Maggie, "it'll be a weight off my mind when the young mistress comes home. If it wasn't for me you'd never think of your stomach or your health. Drest the work!" and she retired with high dodgeon.

Then Clement seated himself, and spread out the clear white sheets of paper before him, but not a word did he write for very long.

He was dreaming of Alice and of the time when her presence would brighten the quaint old vicarage; when she would sit beside him whilst he wrote his sermons, and he would turn from them now and again to look into her loving lovesome face.

"Yes," he said to himself with a smile, "Maggie is right; it is time the young mistress came home, Heaven bless her," and then with an effort he applied himself to his work.

He was so happy, so happy! all the smiling world seemed to rejoice with him; and a very humble, a very thankful man was Clement Dane in that hour—the last hour of joy which should visit him through weary months and years.

His pen flew rapidly over the paper, love lending speed to it, because not until his task was finished could he again see Alice. His thoughts were pleasant ones, and life lay stretched before him in perfect glory.

Outside, he heard Maggie scolding the odd-job man for allowing weeds to appear in the pickles bed, and complaining that there was little or no mint left in the kitchen garden, and she would have "to go down to the doctor's for some, because the master was so partial to mint sauce with his mutton, and the doctor's gardener was a man worth hiving, which was more than she could say of some people;" and Clement Dane smiled to himself at the old servant's wrath, and, lifting his head, saw her tramping steadily out of the grounds.

At the gate she paused to speak with a woman, but the distance was too great for him to recognise the latter, and he returned again to his work. But he was not destined to finish those notes. In a little while a head appeared through the open window, and a voice, bold and defiant, spoke his name.

He started to his feet, his worn face horrible in its distortion and pallor, and, flinging out his arms, cried in a tone of terrible anguish and despair,—

"Good Heaven! Kate!"

The woman laughed.

"Yes, it is I, Clement. Come out; I want to talk with you. I can do so better away from the house—come."

He obeyed her with an awful dumb submission more terrible than any violence could be; he seemed to have no power of resistance, and his companion regarded him with amusement not unminged with scorn.

"Where shall we go?" she asked. "Of course I do not think of remaining at the

Vicarage, your hospitality is of the most lukewarm order. Shall I lead the way?" He only bowed, and followed in her wake as she struck across the lawn, towards an adjacent wood through which the river ran, and so on until they reached the bridge where, only a few short hours ago, he had stood with Alice. Here she paused.

"This is a very suitable spot for a comfortable tête-à-tête," she said, with a wicked smile which displayed her white, glistening teeth to advantage. But the Vicar was roused from his inattention at last; he caught his companion by the arm.

"Not here," he said, hoarsely. "I will not listen to you here, this place is sacred. Let us go farther."

She looked sharply at him; then she said, significantly,—

"I can read between the lines. This is the favourite resort of the woman who was to have taken my place. Well, I do not wish to do violence to your feelings. Let us walk by the river together, I have so much to say to you; but words are not easy after so long and apparently so hopeless a parting." Then she laughed again as she laid her shapely ungloved hand upon his arm, and they disappeared amidst the trees together.

Hours went by. Maggie had returned with her basket of mint, and was busying herself preparing "the master's dinner," when the odd-job man entered.

"You may as well spare yourself the trouble," he said, glad for once to be wicker than she. "The Vicar won't be home, I reckon, for a month o'time. He left home as soon as you had gone. That bold-faced woman you talked to at the gate fetched him away."

Maggie was not alarmed yet, and her master's dignity and honour were dear to her; in a moment she was on the defensive.

"The Vicar is at the beck and call of every sick or shiftless body, native or not. The lady asked for him, and I directed her here. Now, if you have any more hints to throw out, throw 'em elsewhere, Bob Carter, or I'll get you discharged as sure as my name's Maggie Rawson;" and Bob, who had really a ridiculous dread of the housekeeper's temper, shuffled away.

She worked on steadily until all her tasks were finished, and was surprised when the light suddenly failed her and she found that it was nearly nine.

"Dear I dear!" she said, "how they do impose on his good nature. He'll be most furnished by the time he reaches home. It's time he had a wife. He won't be so forgetful, then."

It could not have been much after four when Clement left the house; but he was called so often, and so far on errands of mercy, that Maggie was not in the least disturbed by his absence. She put his lamp ready for him, and had just sat down to her sewing when she heard a lagging step along the path. "He's dog-tired," she thought, and hurried to open the door.

But only a round-faced boy looked up at her.

"Here's a note from the parson for ye," he said, "and here's another yer to take up to Miss Armstrong; parson win't comin' back to-night," and before Maggie could reply he was gone.

With an odd tinkling of the heart she tore open her own note from which fell a substantial cheque; but as she read, her ruddy face blanched, and, uttering a wild cry, she snatched up bonnet and shawl and rushed towards Dr. Armstrong's, quite scandalising the precise footman by her manner of entrance; then, unannounced, she entered the doctor's presence, crying with wild sobs,

"My master! my master! oh sir, for Miss Alice's sake, if not for his, tell me what it means. He has left me, and will never come back to me again."

"Hush," said the physician, sternly, "my daughter must not be alarmed."

CHAPTER II.

Poor Maggie, urged by Dr. Armstrong, told her tale, incoherently it is true, but still with sufficient lucidity for him to grasp the facts of the case.

"I think," he said, "we had better have Miss Alice here. After she has read Mr. Dane's note she may be able to assure us all is well; if not, I shall ask you to remain with her until we know what to do. I cannot trust her to the care of the maids; then ringing a bell, he waited for Alice to join them.

She came presently, a pretty figure clad in white, and wearing a look of disappointment on her innocent young face, because she had been waiting, and waiting vainly, all that evening for Clement's coming.

She looked a little startled as she glanced from Maggie to her father; but before she could speak the latter said,—

"Come here, my dear, and try not to be alarmed. Maggie has been telling me a strange story about Mr. Dane; but this note will doubtless clear up all the mystery," and briefly repeating the housekeeper's tale, he handed his daughter Clement's message.

She took it with trembling hands, and as she mastered the meaning of those few words her cheeks took the hue of death.

"My darling, this is an eternal good-bye. I shall never return to Stillbrook, and all my prayer is that you may forget one who loved you all too well. As for me, if you wish me any good, wish me death, for I am an utterly ruined and disgraced man. Heaven bless you!"—CLEMENT.

"Read it," said Alice, in a strange, hard voice. "I cannot tell you the awful truth!"

"Oh! Miss Alice," cried Maggie, seeking to comfort her, "don't take it so badly;" but almost roughly the unhappy girl thrust her aside, and with her arms about the doctor, pleaded,—

"Father, you will find him! You must bring him back, or I shall go mad. He has been lured away—of his own free will he would not leave me. Perhaps," a great horror in her voice, "he has been murdered, and even this note is a forgery. Oh, go! go! do not lose a moment if you would save my heart from breaking!"

Dr. Armstrong needed no second bidding. Kissing his child and commending her to Maggie's care, he hurried out into the warm, still night in search of the Vicar's church-warden; but that gentleman met him half way between the two houses.

"Is that you, Armstrong?" questioned Mr. Robson. "I was coming up to yours, but I hardly felt I could meet Miss Alice. This is a sad business, and it annoys me Bob Carter should have spread the news so industriously. All the town is agog, and Dane's name is on every lip. What can it mean? I cannot bring myself to believe evil of him."

"I don't know," gloomily; "he confesses himself that he is an utterly ruined and disgraced man. It is very hard upon my poor girl. Even the wedding-day was fixed, and the honeymoon trip settled."

"It is hard; but I have not lost faith in Dane yet. Whatever is wrong you may rest assured he will right, if possible. I am willing to bet a cool thou' churchwarden though I am, that he is more sinned against than sinning. And now what are we to do? I should suggest that we organize search parties; and it would be well to drag the river, although I hope Dane has not taken his troubles there!"

Robson's advice was acted upon, rovers volunteering to join in the search; but nowhere was the Vicar to be found. He had vanished as completely as though he had never been.

The shrewdest detectives of the day visited Stillbrook; but, despite Dr. Armstrong's liberal gifts, they failed to discover anything beyond the bare fact that a man and woman answering to the description given of Clement and his companion had left Thurgood, a

neighbouring village, for London. They took tickets for Gower-street, but from that point all trace of them was lost.

Advertisements appeared in all the leading dailies, but never a reply came to assure the doctor, or save Alice from despair.

She went about, the very ghost of herself, pale and hollow-eyed, brooding always upon her loss and her lover's probable fate, until people began to whisper that "Alice Armstrong was not long for this world; that she was breaking her heart for love of Clement Dane."

Maggie was her greatest comfort in these heavy days, and together they spoke continually of the man each in her fashion had loved so well, and neither doubted nor condemned him. For awhile the Vicarage was closed; strange clergymen performed the duties it had once been Clement's joy to discharge, until finally a new vicar was appointed, and folks forgot the old, or spoke of him only at rare intervals, and the story of his disappearance seemed but half-remembered. How could they guess how often in the awful days following his flight his heart dwelt with them, that with all the force of a strong nature he longed for the old familiar faces, the old familiar friendly voices?

The day succeeding his disappearance a man and woman sat together in a room of a second-rate hotel. The man wore the dress of a clergyman and looked worn by anxiety and woe; the woman, who was evidently his senior, and had once been handsome, had lost all traces of refinement, and bore unmistakable marks of dissipation in her dark face and in her flashing eyes. A decanter of brandy stood beside her, from which she frequently replenished her glass; once she pushed it towards her companion bidding him drink, but he thrust it back with a gesture of disgust—she laughed coarsely.

"You need not be so particular, my friend, and you were better company than; but you have reformed. My faith! how amused I was when I learned casually you were posing as the model parson. Truly miracles are not yet out of date!"

"For Heaven's sake, don't," he said, lifting his tortured face a moment. "My powers of endurance are well-nigh exhausted. Woman, whom, to my shame and horror, I call wife, show me some mercy. Have I not suffered long enough to atone for that one crime? Oh, Heaven! how my sin has found me out."

"It always does; you've scriptural authority for that," she answered jocosely; "but now listen, my most repentant of prodigals. You have admitted that I am your lawful wife; well, then, give me a share of your luxuries, your home—I ask no more than my right."

"You forfeited all your rights long ago," sternly. "Shall I, a minister of God, set such a creature over my household—allow you to enter honest homes, to call honest women friends? I tell you I will not add to my burden of guilt and shame. I will not so disgrace my high and holy profession."

"Profession!" she answered, her face grown awful with anger. "You say profession advisedly, for you are an utter and complete sham."

With a gesture of infinite weariness and pain he turned from her, and like one in a dream he heard her idly drumming upon the table; presently she rose and joined him at the window.

"Come, be reasonable," she said, in a conciliatory tone; "it is not much I ask. No doubt you are angry with me for my little deception; you thought me dead and buried, and my resurrection has naturally upset all your calculations."

"Woman!" he cried in the anguish of his heart, "do you know, do you care, what misery that deception has caused, what worse misery might have followed? If I had made an innocent woman the partner of my unintentional crime, I am afraid to think what punishment I should have awarded you."

"Oh, I know all about your little tendresse,"

blithely, "and really I am sorry for the girl; but right is right occasionally, and my claim holds good. Now, tell me when shall we return to Stillbrook?"

"Never; I could not insult my people by flinging a firebrand in their midst."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"You will never return alone unless—unless you seek the redress the law will give you; and that you dare not do, because I know your crime, and should at once expose it."

Clement Dane covered his face with his hands.

"Do your worst, Kate; I deserve it all; but I should have been glad to think my unworthiness was not known to my friends. Heaven knows in what manner I have sought to make atonement for my sin; how bitterly I have repented—"

"Where is the use of repentance?" Kate cried, laughingly. "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die."

Then turning to the table, once again she filled her glass and emptied it. A moment later she was reclining on a couch, and slowly, slowly, whilst the wretched man watched her, the heavy eyelids drooped, and she sank into a deep sleep; but he waited to make "assurance double sure."

And when certain stentorian sounds testified to the depth of her sleep, he very quietly wrote a cheque (he dared not part with his little store of money, having resolved not to apply to his bankers, feeling sure that Dr. Armstrong would go to them for news of him, and his only object was to lose himself).

He looked once at the face he used to worship long ago!—oh, so long ago!—it was terrible now in its drunken sleep—then he stole out of the room like a thief.

He paid his little bill below, and hurried into the street, glancing fearfully up at the windows, lest that dreadful woman should have awakened and discovered his absence.

On and on he went, unconscious of the way he took, careless of the curious looks cast upon him; and at last he came to a narrow thoroughfare, which seemed to consist solely of second-hand clothes shops. Into one of these he disappeared, and when once more he found his way into the street, he was habited like a respectable artisan.

"I have left the old life behind me," he thought, as he went wearily on, "and all the old friends, Alice, oh, my darling! my darling! if you could but know me as I am! Thank Heaven I am spared that torture."

And now what should he do? He wandered on listlessly, wearily, conscious only of one wish; praying only that death might come to him this heavy night.

All around were the sounds of gay laughter and merry voices, bright faces passed him. He was blind to them.

He only knew, as the darkness wrapped him round, that he had reached the river-side, and in those waters, troubled as they were, there was rest.

He leant upon the bridge and looked below. How the stars shone with reflected glory in these unquiet depths. Would they shine as undimmed upon his upturned face, if so he died?

Would Alice ever learn how and why he had died? Ah! Heaven forbid that such knowledge should come to her and darken her fair young life!

Might all things glad and goodly be hers, no matter what the pain to him might be. Life was practically over with him, he could never return to old scenes and old associations; he was an outcast, a wretched pariah, who feared even to glance through the bars of the gate of that paradise he had left behind. Then what remained for him but death?

Then a sudden sick self-scorn possessed him. Was this his religion?

"I have preached comfort and strength to others," he thought, "shall not my faith strengthen me?"

With an effort he tore himself away from the river.

"If I would live," he reflected, "I must get work, and quickly; my little stock of money will soon be exhausted." And as he moved slowly on, he was swallowed up from view by the mists and darkness of the night—its emblems of the life which lay before him.

There could be no going back for him; Kate, that awful woman he called wife, would seek him out again. It would be so easy for her to find him.

No, he would cast in his lot with the poor and needy, striving earnestly by labours of love to atone for that crime which had darkened eleven years of his life. He had been so young then—only nineteen. Ah! the pity of it, the pity of it!

He hardly dared to let his thoughts rest, if only a moment, upon Alice and the life they had pictured together. If he did, it was to pray that she had ceased to think of him, that someone worthier than he had taught her forgetfulness of her heavy trial.

And all the while, down at Stillbrook, she was loving him with all her innocent, loyal heart, and would not cease to hope that one day, when the clouds had passed, he would return to her, and life would be one long dream of happiness—all the more intense because of the sorrow that had gone before.

The Reverend Arthur Butler—the new Vicar, was a very different type of man to his predecessor. He was well-looking, in a healthy, and rather a florid style; he had never known a cross in life, and he looked it. He preached good pithy sermons, was excellent at giving advice; but when it came to sympathy he fell short. He had not the least pity for Clement Dane; if he had sinned, he deserved to suffer; if he had not sinned, he was mad to blacken his cause by flight. Of course he knew all about Alice's engagement, of the marriage broken off at the eleventh hour. The ladies of Stillbrook could talk of nothing else for days after his arrival, and he regarded the girl with some degree of interest.

She was so pretty and dainty in ways and appearance, and her pallor in no way detracted from her charms. It was natural she should keenly feel her altered position; it must be extremely awkward for her to parry the questions; and receive the condolences of her friends and acquaintances; but of course she would put all thoughts of that fellow, Dane, out of her life; so reasoned the Reverend Arthur. And then from being interested in her he began to care for her in a fashion which astonished himself, and soon it was the dearest desire of his heart to win her. He had not the slightest doubt of his ultimate success, he was blessed with a most comfortable belief in his own powers and his natural good looks; so he frequented those walks Alice most affected, visited the cottages where she was generally to be found—for she was never forgetful of Clement's poor pensioners—until it began to be whispered in Stillbrook that Miss Armstrong would marry the Reverend Arthur.

Of course the girl was the last to hear this rumour; she might have remained in ignorance much longer but for Maggie, who came home one evening flushed and irate. She had been to carry a jelly to one of the pensioners, a garrulous old dame, and the communication she received had startled her beyond measure; she was indignant, too, and when Alice asked in her gentle way what ailed her, she flashed upon her with the question,—

"Is it true what everybody is saying, miss? Are you going to put that popinjay Butler in my master's place? You that swore to be true to him, you that were so nearly his wife?"

The girl sank back white and trembling in her chair. It was two years since Clement went away, but any abrupt mention of him brought back the old cruel pain, with the anguish of long, long months, to keener life. Presently however she spoke with that little touch of dignity which had come to her through her sorrow.

"Maggie, you are forgetting the respect due

to your mistress. Sit down and tell me quietly what you mean."

"It's just this, miss," Maggie said, a trifle cowed by the girl's manner, and much grieved at her own conduct: "all over Stillbrook it is understood you are to marry Mr. Butler, that your engagement will soon be made known, and oh, miss! oh, miss! I can't bear to think of the master forgotten—he that was so good to all, he that worshipped you with all his sad heart. Tell me it isn't true; oh, honey! tell me you won't play him false."

The girl covered her eyes with her hands and burst into wild weeping.

"It is not true!" she sobbed. "Don't you know me better, Maggie? How could I dream of a new love—I, whose life was bound up in the old—I, who watch hourly, daily, for his return? Maggie, Maggie! sometimes I think this anguish of suspense will kill me;" and then they wept together as women will; but Alice recovered self-control first, and lifting her head, said, quickly,—

"Wherever and whenever you hear this story, you have my authority to deny it. If I do not marry Clement, I will go down to my grave his own loyal love, and—and Mr. Butler has never paid me any particular attention. It is all a mistake."

"It ain't a mistake about him," retorted Maggie, more emphatically than elegantly.

CHAPTER III.

MR BUTLER was in a state of doubt; whether Alice purposely avoided him, or whether it was by the untowardness of fate they so rarely met now, he could not decide.

She had given up her class in the Sunday school on the plea of ill health, and, indeed, she was looking so frail and white that her father had grown alarmed for her.

He was incensed against Clement, too, that he had wrought so great and sad a change in his idolised daughter.

She was older and graver than she should have been for her years; it was a rare thing now to see her smile, and the happy laughter which had made music in the home, now never rang out.

She did not come dancing to the door to meet him with some idle jest, or little bit of news.

Always tender, always ready to minister to his comfort or pleasure, she was yet so changed that she bore not the least resemblance to the saucy girl of two short years ago; and it was the doctor's desire that she should forget all that concerned her one-time lover and chosen husband.

He was not at all averse to receive the Reverend Arthur as a son. He was of fairly good birth, of irreproachable antecedents, and, apart from his stipend as vicar, had a comfortable income.

So when the young man, driven to desperation, came to him asking for his daughter's hand he received the proposal with favour.

"Understand Butler," he said, "I will not force my child's inclinations; she will in this, as in all other things, please herself. She is a good girl, and I trust to her judgment; but I am afraid she still hankers after Dane, and if it is so you must do your best to destroy her faith in him. I would like to see her married to some good man before I die; because beside me she has no other relative. She will be amply provided for, but she is so innocent of the world and its ways she needs a protector. Go to her, my boy, and all good luck attend you."

So the Reverend Arthur went to seek Alice. He was a little nervous, because with all the force of his coarse and narrow mind he loved her.

He found her sewing in her own especial room, and it seemed to him she had never been so fair as now. She was daintily dressed in palest blue, and her luxuriant hair, escaping a little from its bands, nestled about her white throat and curved cheeks.

His heart beat faster as he looked at her, and her very calmness but added to his confusion.

She rose quietly to meet him. There was no hurry in her movements or her voice, as she gave him her hand—very reluctantly, if he had not known it.

"You are an early visitor, Mr. Butler," she said, in her gentle voice; "but yours is such a busy life, I suppose you have to utilise every available hour."

And then she tried to release her fingers from the clasp of his, but tried in vain. He was a resolute man, and he did not intend she should escape him now.

"It is true I am a busy man," he answered, quickly; "but not too much absorbed in business that I cannot spare time for human affections, human interests. Because I am a clergyman I am not necessarily exempt from the weaknesses of the flesh, Miss Armstrong. Alice, I love you! and, by your father's permission, ask you to be my wife!"

He had meant his declaration of love to be an outburst of eloquence, but somehow the clear calm eyes fixed upon him, scattered all his preconcerted speeches to the wind.

He was conscious only that he cared more for Alice than he had cared for any creature or anything on earth before.

The girl had succeeded now in releasing her hand, and her voice, though low, was very steady, as she answered him,—

"Papa knows my hopes and wishes on this subject, Mr. Butler. You know quite enough of my past to feel sure I shall never marry, unless—"

"Unless Dane returns," he interrupted, "and that he will never do. Will you waste your life and loveliness upon a dream? Alice, dearest Alice, I swear I will try to make you happy, and our marriage would please your father—he desires it."

She stood before him with loosely-folded hands, her face grown dreamy, her eyes instinct with love.

"My father," she said, softly, "would never wish my life-long misery; and in my own sight I should be degraded and I forsake in adversity the man I loved in prosperity. Perhaps you cannot understand the workings of a woman's heart—there are many who fail to do so; don't you see that having promised to marry Clement I am in the sight of Heaven his wife? that if I break my vows I am guilty of cruellest fraud?"

"I see nothing of the kind," roughly; "your ideas are altogether quixotic, and impractical. Dane has left you—consequently you are free. He has been guilty of some misdemeanour; he probably never had any right to woo you, therefore his claim cannot hold good. Don't you know what our little world will say if you cling to your absurd faith in him?"

"Yes, I know," with quiet dignity, "but the world shall not come between us; we leave our fate in higher hands. I am waiting, waiting always for his return, and, if he never comes," here her voice trembled and broke, "if he never comes, he will still find me faithful on the other side of the grave. I would give you hope if I could, but that is impossible; and now that you have learned whose image fills my heart, you will no longer desire me for your wife."

"You are wrong! I would marry you to-morrow, even though I was sure you never could care for me."

Her beautiful eyes lost all their dreaminess. One scornful look she cast at him, then she said,—

"The ways of men are curious," and moved a little from him, but he followed her.

"Alice, is it yes or no?" he demanded.

"It is no! it will always be no! please go away and hurt me no more. Save yourself further pain."

"I will win you yet," he said, stormily, "and before I go, let me ask you if you can reconcile your conscience to this love of Clement Dane, who, for aught you know to

the contrary, is a married man? If not, why was he in the power of the woman who drew him from Stillbrook?"

"I trust him," was the girl's only answer; but she was shivering and her pale face had grown still paler; the Reverend gentleman had not been the first to suggest this dreadful thing.

But not for worlds should Arthur Butler see he had power to move her. Her faith he could not shake, only she was horribly afraid for Clement and his happiness. Now, as she stood silent her lover said,—

"You are alone in your trust, even Doctor Armstrong doubts him, and it would please him to hear you were my promised wife."

"I have answered," she said, steadily. "I have no more to say."

Her reluctance to listen to him but added fuel to the fire of his love. He was all the more determined to win her. There was a certain sort of pleasure in compelling her to his will, and then—well, then, much as this poor semblance of man could love, he loved Alice. He captured one small hand in his.

"You are cruel to me and to yourself," he said, hoarsely. "One day you will be sorry. Tell me if I can bring you proofs of Dane's previous marriage, will you listen to me then? I am not a hard man, Alice, and I only wish to make you happy."

"If you can prove he deliberately deceived me, I will be your wife," Alice said, steadily; "but you will never be able to do this, and so my bond will remain unfulfilled. Don't you see it would kill me to doubt him? that if once I could be made to understand he was utterly false and base, my heart would break, because all my faith in humanity would be lost? Mr. Butler, you had far better thrust all thought of me from your mind, all care for me from your heart. For the honour you have done me I thank you—but I ask you to leave me in peace."

He took his hat, looking considerably dashed, yet there was a certain amount of doggedness in the man.

"I shall hope still," he said, "a woman's no oftener means yes. Shall I tell the Doctor your decision?"

"No. Please allow me that privilege," and with a cold bow she signified their interview was ended.

Certainly, Arthur Butler had not furthered his suit by endeavouring to degrade his rival.

And when he had gone Alice went at once to her father. He glanced quickly at her face. There was no coyness there, no happiness which, girl like, she would have striven to suppress if her suitor had been successful.

She stood, slim and fair, before him; her eyes bright with her hidden pain, a flush on her usually pale cheeks.

"Father," she said, quietly, "you know upon what errand Mr. Butler came; he said he had your authority to plead his cause. Is that true?"

"Quite true, my dear. Butler is a good fellow, a worthy fellow. And—and, really, Alice, it is time you were settled."

He spoke uneasily, because the expression of her face was not reassuring; and when he had ended his lame speech, the girl said,—

"You must hear me. There is only one man on earth I will marry—his name I need not speak. As for my new lover, father! I loathe him! He has spoken ill of Clement."

He drew her to his side with infinite gentleness—this poor, motherless little daughter who was all the world to him.

"Be just, Alice! Butler is an honourable man; there is not one action in his life he need wish to hide."

"He is a Pharisee!" she cried, her sweet voice jarred and out of tune; "and he thinks only of his own happiness, his own good. He would be glad if he could prove Clement utterly base; but that he never can do, and so I defy him."

Dr. Armstrong stared at the girl in the greatest amazement.

"My dear! my dear!" he remonstrated, "do you guess how deeply you are wronging an innocent man? I wish to Heaven you had never known Dane, or that, having known him, you had never loved him."

"And both wishes are equally vain. Oh, father! father! keep me with you always! If I ever can be happy any more, it is with you, and in serving you. Oh, my dear! do not urge this hateful marriage upon me. I cannot endure the thought of it. When Clement comes, I want him to find me waiting for him, true in heart and thought."

And then she wept so bitterly, clung to him so fondly, that the Doctor could urge her no farther, and Arthur Butler's name was spoken no more between them.

But Mr. Butler was not inactive. He was determined to destroy Alice's faith in Dane, and with her faith, her love.

Without seeing fit to enlighten his parishioners as to his movements, he went to Cambridge, having first assured himself of the date of Clement's entrance there as a student.

Once in the town, with the means he possessed, he gathered together many clues to the lost man's history; and when he returned to Stillbrook, it was in triumph.

He went straight to Dr. Armstrong's. Only Alice was at home, and she received him as frigidly as her gentle heart would permit.

"You have had a pleasant holiday," she said, in soft, cold tones; and he answered,—

"Not a pleasant, but still a successful one. I have been to Cambridge."

She started, flushed, then said, quietly,—

"You are a Cambridge man, I believe."

"No, Oxford; but I went for news of Dane; and I found what I wanted."

Her breath came faster, but she had still strength sufficient to hide all that she felt and suffered.

This man must not for one moment believe she doubted Clement; but she was quite unable to speak, and it may be he guessed this, for he went on glibly,—

"You told me once that if I could bring you proofs of Dane's villainy you would listen to me. I have brought them. After an almost interminable search, I came upon the record of his marriage."

Her face grew ashen in its pallor, but still the tremulous lips forced themselves to say,—

"Go on; I am listening to you."

"It took place on October the twentieth, 18—. It was solemnized at St. Mary's. Read for yourself," thrusting a copy of a marriage certificate before her.

She only saw "Clement Dane, bachelor, and Kate Spendwell, spinster." All else was hidden from her, and she reeled as though about to fall. But when Butler would have supported her, she wrenched herself from his hold, and said, hoarsely,—

"That proves nothing; she must have died long ago—long ago."

"Not necessarily; I sought in vain for any notice of her death. Now, Alice, what will you say to me? You can but fulfil your promise."

Her eyes met his gravely and steadily.

"You have not proved that he deliberately deceived me. If Mr. Dane married at the date you give, he was a mere boy, and there are doubtless reasons why he should wish me to remain in ignorance of a union which was probably not a happy one. And never, never would he have sought to make me his wife unless he honestly and truly believed himself a widower."

"You are mad!" Butler cried, angrily. "Why do you so wilfully blind yourself to the facts of the case? I am willing, if you wish it, to hunt out the woman who wrecked your life and his, by her appearance here. Depend upon it, she is the Kate Spendwell he made his wife."

But Alice smiled contemptuously. "I am not prone to doubt those I love," she said, proudly. "You must substantiate your evidence before I give it credence;" and then,

to his utter discomfiture, she left him alone in the room. When he had recovered his scattered senses he went to seek the Doctor. He showed him the copy of Clement Dane's marriage lines; he expatiated on his love for Alice and his rival's unworthiness; and the Doctor listened in a troubled way. When Butler had ended, he said,—

"Look here, friend, I would like to see Alice your wife, but, as I told you before, I never shall try to force her inclinations. If you can win her, well and good; if not, the child remains with me. And really I don't see that you have proved Dane a bigamist. No doubt he married wretchedly, otherwise his wife would have been acknowledged by his family, and I think there is hardly the shadow of doubt that she is dead. Dane was not a man to sin grossly, and you can bring no proof that the woman who lured him away was his wife. For aught we know to the contrary, he is dead and buried, murdered by some wretch who had an interest in his death."

Butler dared not show his chagrin at the view Dr. Armstrong took of the case; but none the less he left the house in a towering rage, more than ever resolved to expose the late vicar's peccadilloes, and win Alice for himself. How dared she so flout and scorn him! he, who might wed almost where he would in the county families, for he was a popular man; he, against whom no malicious tongue dared wag; whose name had never suffered the breath of slander!

Alice Armstrong's indifference to him only made him the more eager to call her his, only added fuel to the flame which burned within him; he held, too, that all things come to those who wait. He did not cease his visits, although he knew how greatly the girl resented them. His attentions were not less marked or less public. The man had absolutely no delicacy of feeling; rather it would be a triumph of pride to show his little world that she who once had scorned him had been conquered by the power of his eloquence and force of his passion. Then Alice, by her beauty and the sweet graciousness of her manner, would reflect credit upon him; nor did he in the least forget the fact that at the doctor's death she would be entitled to a very pretty fortune.

The Reverend Arthur Butler was not averse to the good things of this world, and Dr. Armstrong was an influential man, who could assist his son-in-law to materially improve his condition. All things considered, Alice was just the very woman to make his wife; and so unceasing was his pursuit of her, that at last he went to her father in greatest distress.

"Father," she said, clinging about him, "you must protect me from Mr. Butler. From disliking him I have grown to loathe and despise him; but he persists in haunting my steps, in treating me as though I were all but his affianced wife. It angers me to feel that many regard me in that light—think I am false to all the vows I vowed to Clement—and, oh! I would not even seem to cast a slight upon his dear and honoured memory."

The Doctor sighed.

"Dear," he said, "it would make me very happy to know you cared for Butler. I am getting an old man, and it hurts me to think that when I am gone you will be all alone. Cannot you forget Dane? Child, child, I do not think there is the slightest ground for hope, that he will return. He confessed himself utterly ruined and disgraced; those are strong words to use—Dane would not use them lightly."

"No," answered Alice, more steadily than she had yet spoken; "but if he wrote them, he wrote them under the weight of deepest agony and mental excitement. One is not answerable at such a time for one's words and actions."

"But think, my dearest; Butler holds proofs of his marriage. There are no proofs

of his wife's death. You must face that fact, Alice."

"I have done so, and no one can shake the conclusion at which I have arrived. If Clement married—and we knew he did—his wife has since died. He must, too, have had some very good reason for concealing this wedding. Father, you knew and loved Clement in the past. You will not let a stranger turn your heart against him, and believe me—oh, believe me! Mr. Butler is an evil and bitter man, who preaches a charity he does not practise, who cares nothing for the happiness of others so that he encompasses his own."

"Alice!" sternly, "I will not listen to you when you speak so unjustly of a good and worthy man. Is it not like you to be so prejudiced?"

Then as her lips grew tremulous, and her eyes were suffused by tears, he hated himself for his harshness.

"There, child, let us say no more on the subject; you shall marry or not, as it pleases you. We will not quarrel over the subject," and then he kissed her fondly, breathing nothing of his disappointment to her.

Most earnestly he desired this marriage; he absolutely believed in Butler's goodness, not being a shiftil reader of character, the reverend gentleman had not found it a hard matter to win his affection and esteem, and he believed that if only Alice could once be brought to favour Butler's suit, she would soon grow to love him with all her gentle heart.

Why should she nurse the memory of Dane to the spoiling of her whole life? He had left her forever, he said; must she go mourning all her years for one who never had the right to woo or win her? But though he thought thus, not one word did he utter against the man to whom she clung with loyal heart and true.

He only smoothed her pretty hair, whispering words of comfort and of love, and then, as with aching heart he saw how pale and wan she had grown, he suggested that they should go away—he, she, and Maggie—that they should wander hither and thither at their own will. He would take her to such places as had found favour with him when a student; through France, along the Rhine valley, into Italy, and together they would forget all that had gone before.

Alice caught eagerly at the suggestion, and for days afterwards was brighter than she had ever been since Clement's disappearance.

Butler was aghast at the news of the projected journey, but the doctor said cheerfully,—

"Absence from old scenes and old associations will be a good tonic for the child; and as for you, Butler, remember the good old proverb *Nil Desperandum*. Alice will come home brighter and merrier; you will yet see her as she used to be, or I am a false prophet."

Butler looked doubtful; the girl's demeanour towards him had been unusually frigid of late, and, try as he would, he could not set aside the barrier of coldness she had raised between them.

Still he went to bid her good-bye, and wish her a pleasant journey; and then he could not refrain from begging her sometimes to think kindly of him.

The blood rushed hotly into her face. A very whirlwind of indignation shook her soul. She was more than half-frightened by her own passion, having been always so gentle and gracious.

"You dare ask kindness of me!" she said, in a low voice; "you, who have done your best to blacken your predecessor's name to his people, who have taught them to regard him as a scoundrel and a hypocrite, warring their love and reverence from him to yourself! Hush, you shall hear me speak now. I will not go in silence. I could bear my own wrongs without complaint; but not his! not his! Do you think I am unaware of the evil

told you have spread again and again in the past few days? I have read commiseration for myself, in the looks of those around, that I had been the dupe of an unscrupulous man. My poor people have asked me openly, 'if Mr. Dane had a wife already, and if not, why did he run away?' The secret of his marriage was known only to you, my father, and myself. Why did you break it abroad?"

The man looked at her with angry eyes. "It was not meet that he should receive reverence who deserved only loathing. That he should live in 'the odour of sanctity' who merited the worst the laws of his country could inflict. I am not so blinded by love that I fail to see my duty."

"Your duty!" scornfully. "I wonder how much the thought of it weighed with you? I wonder, too, that you so forget to practise the greatest of all virtues—charity! I am glad that I have had this opportunity of showing you in a measure how I regard you."

She drew nearer to him then, her limpid grey eyes all glowing with love for Clement and scorn of his rival.

"And above all, I wish you to remember that you cannot shake my faith in him; that I am waiting, waiting always for his return."

"And if he never comes," scornfully, "what then?"

"We shall meet above, and understand all that has been so cruel here," she answered, in a low voice. "He will know that, if he never knows on earth, that I was loyal and true even unto death."

Butler rose with his most righteous air.

"Do you understand, Miss Armstrong, in what fashion the world would regard your conduct?"

"I am inclined to believe it would accord me greater charity than you have done; and so long as nothing is proved against a man our laws hold him guiltless. Have you anything more to say, Mr. Butler?"

"Yes; that I do not despair of winning you yet, and showing you the folly of your present line of conduct."

He paused; then, as Alice made no answer, he went on,—

"I am willing to forget and forgive all your harsh words and unkind actions on the score of your youth, and out of pity for your past sufferings. I am willing to wait until your return before again pleading my cause. I do not wish to harass you, but to save you from yourself and your infatuation, to make your life in the future as happy as it has been wretched in the past. If you may in a thousand times to-day, I will not accept that word for my answer. I am a resolute man. I am young enough to be able to wait my time; and before you return I will bring you the proofs of Dane's villainy, of his knowledge of his wife's existence, and consequently of his perfidy in winning your affections."

Alice smiled contemptuously.

"Bring them duly signed and attested, and I will keep my word. If you can prove that Mr. Dane was so base as to desert his wife and seek to lure an innocent girl into a marriage that would be no marriage at all, you will have taught me to despise and hate where once I revered and loved."

"That is the lesson you will learn. You have given me a new incentive to hope. Good-bye, Miss Armstrong; a pleasant journey to you and success to myself," with which words he tendered his hand, but Alice refused to take it.

"Not yet, not now. There is an armed neutrality between us. Until I know him false, and you what you would have me believe you, I will not touch your hand," and in a somewhat disturbed frame of mind Mr. Butler left her presence.

"I did not think she had so much staying power," he said to himself. "There is more character in her than I could have believed. With Alice Armstrong for my wife what might I not do? I might aspire to a bishopric—I have good abilities, and I see now what help she could give me—and Armstrong has

powerful friends. I will not give up my pursuit of her, and yet, like Richard of Chastity memory, I say,—

"Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?
Was ever woman in this humour won?
I'll have her."

CHAPTER IV.

THE Doctor and Alice left Stillbrook the following day, going from Dover to Calais, where they lingered awhile, there being no need of hurry; then they went on to Paris, the ever gay and ever wonderful.

But not alone to great cities and towns did they confine their attention and researches. Sometimes they hired a *coupe* and drove slowly to some neighbouring village, but most frequently they walked from place to place, their luggage following them by rail or wagon; and the hot sun kissed Alice's pale cheeks into colour, the beauty of the lovely land gladdened her eyes and her heart; and being grateful to her father for all his loving care, she strove to be a gay companion to him, succeeding so well that he believed the sting of her sorrow was less acute, the memory of Clement Dane less dear.

Still seeing Butler with his own eyes, not through Alice's, made keen by love, he wrote him the joyful news of his daughter's returning gaiety and health, and was glad when Butler replied that, if convenient to him, he would join him in Germany, as he had matters of importance to communicate to Miss Armstrong.

The Doctor was delighted. Here was a lover after his own heart; one who persevered in his suit, despite all his lady's frowns and scuffs, and surely Alice would be reasonable now.

The girl received the news quite calmly; only her father noticed she was quieter during the next few days, and that she never mentioned Butler's name.

"She is afraid of the news he brings," he thought; "poor child! poor child! Yet it is better she should learn the worst now, and so recover her lost heart, than waste all her life over one who never deserved a kind thought from her."

It was at Dilsberg Arthur Butler joined the Armstrongs—that quaint old-world town built on the summit of a lofty hill, and it was very easy to find the place where the Doctor had pitched his tent.

But Alice was not in. The doctor said she had a habit of wandering about at will—a habit Butler deprecated. She was probably down by the river. Katrina would doubtless be able to point her out to him.

Katrina, a ruddy-faced, stolid German girl, was nothing loth. Down the street she stamped, everybody looking after the "big Englishman" whose guide she was, and once outside the town walls she paused, shaking her eyes with her hands.

Presently she pointed out a very minute figure almost at the foot of the hill, and telling Butler that was the Fraulein, stolidly retraced to her duties, leaving him to make his way down by a steep and narrow path winding in and out among the bushes.

And at last he reached Alice. She had turned from the contemplation of the blue and smiling river, and was waiting for him to join her, having recognised his figure and bearing from a distance. Greeting him with a cold little bow, she said,—

"My father tells me you have important news for me? I am sorry you troubled to bring them. It would have been so much easier to write."

Her unaffected coldness and dislike of him roused a feeling of anger in his heart, and to himself he said,—

"You have not spared me, neither will I spare you. You shall hear the worst that I can tell, as bluntly as I can tell it."

"I have prosecuted my search diligently

with regard to Dane's antecedents since you left home, and, remembering what reward my inquiries would bring me, I have grudged neither labour nor expense. You do not for a moment doubt the truth of the certificate I brought you?"

"I do not," quietly.

She was very pale, but she gave no sign of fear.

"Very well, we will not travel over that ground again. I will start from the time of my arrival at Cambridge. I went very carefully to work, and was successful beyond my wildest dreams. I met a man who had been Dane's intimate friend all those years ago, and knew the greater part of his history. From him I learned that Dane had married a woman whose hand it would be pollution for you to touch."

Alice gave a sharp cry, then said, slowly,—"Go on; I will hear all now."

"It appears she was very handsome and accomplished, but as evil as she was beautiful; and when Dane got into pecuniary troubles and was forced to confess his marriage to his people, they sent her away to a remote village in Suffolk, from whence she eloped with a whilom friend of his, leaving no trace behind her."

"Poor Clement! I do not wonder now that he was so old and grave for his years," the girl said, dreamily, forgetful of her listener. He, grasping her hands in his, demanded,—

"Do you understand what this means for him and for you? Where is the saint you have been worshipping? What of the man to whom you have been insanely faithful? He never had any right to seek you, and he knew it. Blaxam, the man I met, says his wife must have had some terrible hold over him, or he would have sought and obtained a divorce which none could have denied him. It remains for me to discover what his crime was, and to unearth Kate Dane."

"You have come to me then with your work unfinished?" she said, idly.

"Do you call it unfinished when I bring you proofs of Dane's folly, and of his wretched union? I want my reward—I demand it!"

"You shall receive it when your congenial task is ended. You must bring me proofs that when Mr. Dane did me the honour to ask my hand he was aware that his wife still lived. You must convince me that she is still living. I have not forgotten our compact, and you may judge what faith I have in my lover, when I am willing to risk even marriage with you in token of it—you may guess how fully and firmly I believe in his honour."

His face was not good to look upon as he dropped her hands.

"You are playing with me, but you shall not win. I shall conquer you yet, and then I will make you suffer for the misery you have made me endure."

"That I do not doubt—you are not a merciful man. I am sorry you travelled so far, with so little profit to yourself."

Arthur Butler had returned to Stillbrook quite two months before the Armstrongs arrived. It was the eve of Alice's twenty-first birthday, and all thoughts of festivities on the morrow were put to flight by the letter awaiting the Doctor.

It was from an old and valued friend, a doctor in one of the poorest parts of London, whose health had broken down under the stress of work, and who wrote asking him to take charge of his practice whilst he went away to recruit.

"Of course," said Doctor Armstrong. "I shall be only too happy to oblige Connold. It will seem like being in harness again. But the question is, what am I to do with you, Alice? Maggie is capable of taking care of you in my absence, but I don't like the idea of our parting, it will be our first separation."

Alice made a gesture of negation. She so

dreaded Butler's persistent attentions during her father's absence.

"I do not wish to be left behind," she said, hastily. "Maggie and I will go with you."

"I hardly know what to say to that. Connold lives in an awfully poor part. Of course he has placed his house and domestic at my service, but I question if you could endure life in such a locality, in the very midst of such rough folks as form the mass of his patients."

"Why should you have any fear for me? you will be there to take care of me, and Maggie is a whole host in herself."

So it was decided, much to the Reverend Butler's disgust, that Alice should accompany her father to London, and a few days later the journey was made.

The girl was a little frightened when first she saw the dismal, squalid neighbourhood in which she had volunteered to spend the next three months of her life. Country born and bred, she had been altogether unable, until now, to realise the dirt, the want and misery in which so many thousands drag out a bitter existence.

But she was careful to hide her fears from her father, and gave utterance to no complaint, when she looked out from windows which gave glimpses only of filthy courts, of creatures that scarce seemed human in their degradation and their poverty.

The house itself was large though gloomy, and it was not long before Alice grew accustomed to her new home, not long before she had contrived to impart a more cheerful aspect to the rooms she and her father occupied; then she looked around her for work.

The Doctor himself was much interested in the grimy patients who thronged his friend's surgery; they were a rough lot. His own practice had lain amongst the gently born and nurtured; but his cheery ways won upon them, and many a little life history, many a grievous trouble, did they confide in him.

He told all these things to his daughter; and as she drank in his words, her sensitive face would flush, her sweet eyes fill with tears, to think what misery this fair world holds.

"Father," she said one day, "I think there is work here for me as well as for you. Let me try if I cannot make a few lives a little brighter, a little happier. I would like to do what I can. If I went to these poor people as a friend—"

"My dear," ejaculated the doctor, aghast, "the streets are unsafe for you."

"I need not go alone," she answered quickly. "Maggie shall be my shield, and to the credit of our poor lot it be said that they never insult a sister of mercy or a nurse. Why should they wrong me? I will go only where you choose, and I will wear my simplest, plainest gowns. You will not refuse permission? It will make me happy."

He was harder to move than she had ever known him, but in the end he yielded—reluctantly it is true, but still he did yield, and that was all Alice asked.

Maggie was furious, but the girl found means to pacify her, and soon "the young lady with the pale sweet face and sad eyes," accompanied by her somewhat aggressive-looking servant were well-known figures in the narrow streets and foggy alleys. And at all places where sickness reigned she heard of one who like herself was always welcome, always ready with words of comfort and kindly deeds.

"He's a poor man," said one woman, "but for all that he ain't one o' us; he talks like gentle folks do miss, and when first he came among us we used to jeer at him, and all that, but he never got mad with us. He'd none but good words to give back for bad 'uns, and so we came to think there must be something in him as we couldn't understand. Then we began to like him, and now there ain't a man nor a woman neither in this here court wot 'ld see him put on."

"What is his name?" Alice asked, interested in this hero of humble life.

"Jem Smith, miss; though, all on us call him Gentleman Jem. He ain't no better off nor we; he works all day down at the docks, and comes home dead beat. But he's a plucky one, and won't give in; so at night he has a school. Old Gifford, the broker, lets him have a empty room. He's real mean is Gifford, but he can't stand out against Gentleman Jem. And then, o' Sundays, we go to prayers, and he speaks that there beautiful, you can't guess. Lor! shall I ever forget how good he was to me when my old man was down o' fever. All the blessed time he shared his wages with us; an' when my Tom got about again, an' offered to pay him a bit at a time off our debt, 'No,' he says, 'grave an' quiet-like, 'you're got heaps o' little uns, I ain't got no one but myself; we'll say no more about it.' That's him, miss, all over; and nobody 'ld ever know nothin' about it, if Tom and me hadn't told the truth all over the place."

It was curious, Alice and the Doctor agreed, that although they heard constantly of Gentleman Jem, they had never yet chanced to meet him. The girl even spoke of this to the woman who had praised him so highly.

"Lor!" she said, with uplifted hands, "there ain't no wonder at that; he's at everybody's beck an' call when his work's done. An' it's my belief he don't get sleep and food enough to keep the soul in a ordinary person."

That night, when Alice sat alone with her father, she said, thoughtfully,—

"There are times, papa, when I envy this poor hero, although, if gently reared, life must be awful to him with such surroundings. But it must be a grand thing to win the love and trust of these poor creatures, as he has apparently done. I should feel it an honour to know him."

"It is not improbable that you may meet yet. I confess myself I am anxious to know this paragon. I only hope he will not disappoint me," and then further speech was stayed by the violent ringing of the surgery bell.

The Doctor hurried away, and found a woman waiting for him, whose painted cheeks and tawdry finery told the wretched story of her wretched life all too plainly.

"You must come with me, Doctor," she said, quickly, "there's a mate o' mine lyin' bad in my room up yonder. I brought her home along o' me the night afore last; an' she's eat nothin' since, and says she's a-dyin'. But she won't see a parson, so I came for you."

He took up his hat. It was a common case, but such things went straight home to his kindly heart.

"Lead the way," he said. "What is it you call your friend?"

"Daring Kate; she ain't got no other name as I knows on. She used to be a great singer at a music 'all, only she fell ill and they turned her off."

Down the narrowest and most squalid streets and alleys they went, until at last the woman paused at a house dirtier, if possible, than its neighbours. She turned with an air of rough apology to her companion.

"Mind the stairs, sir; they ain't none o' the safest. Better gi' me yer hand; it's powerful dark, and you might slip," and then she drew him up to the landing on which she rented a wretched room.

A ghastly-looking creature was lying on a mattress; her black hair, disordered and unbound, fell all about her pinched face, for which the glittering dark eyes looked so much too large.

"I am afraid you are very ill," the Doctor began, but she broke in impatiently.

"I know! I know! I don't need a doctor to tell me that. I am dying, so I sent for you, because I have something to say before I go, and I won't have a clergyman here. Sit down, please, and try to listen to me without

interruption. I have not much breath to spare."

Her voice was unlike those to which he was fast becoming familiar, her language and pronunciation were correct.

He looked at her with profoundest pity. What misfortune or sin had brought her to this pass? Her voice broke in sharply upon his reverie.

"I am a married woman, and, Doctor, I want you to promise when I am gone that you will try to find my husband, and let him know when and where I died; he will be glad to hear the news, he must have wished my death so long. And you will send him this paper; it is my marriage certificate. I have carried it with me wherever I went. You may look at it now, if you will."

Unfolding the torn and tattered paper, the doctor uttered a startled cry.

"Clement Dane! what Clement Dane? Are you his wife?"

"Yes," she answered, with a mocking smile, "I have that honour. And so you know him! How curiously things come about. Where did you know him?"

"At Stillbrook; he was for some years vicar there."

"Yes," she assented, "and he disappeared mysteriously. I read the accounts in the papers, and they amused me. They were all so very wide of the mark. Now that I find you know him, I shall be more willingly tell you my story, trusting to you to use your utmost endeavour to find him, Clement. I have been a bad and cruel woman; but even I am a little sorry for the harm I did him. He was so young and trustful. I was bold and unscrupulous; but let me begin from the very beginning that you may understand, and for all that followed our marriage you must not blame him. It was my doing—all my doing, that I will swear now, and as I am a dying woman you will not doubt my truth. It was when he was a student at Cambridge we first met. He was a lad of nineteen, I a woman of twenty-six, handsome (I may say it now), and without a conscientious scruple. I was his equal in birth, but in nothing else.

"My father had left me a legacy of debts and dishonour, nothing more, and I was compelled to earn my livelihood as a daily governess. I hated the life, and would have done anything to change my lot. I thought it providential when Clement fell in love with me, and I used all my powers of fascination to bring him to my feet. I succeeded only too well, and when he proposed marriage, I consented on condition that the ceremony should be strictly private, alleging as my reason for this that his father would naturally object to me on the score of my poverty and superior age. I was afraid of Mr. Dane's intervention, for even then my past would not have borne too close an inspection. I suppose my vices were hereditary.

"Well, we were married, and it was not long before I threw off all semblance of affection for my husband, who, growing ashamed of my violence and excesses, was only too glad to conceal the fact of our union. He had hired a small cottage just outside the town, where I held my diminutive court, and I was happiest when my wretched young husband was not amongst my guests. I spent money lavishly, heedless of his remonstrances or reproaches, and Mr. Dane began to write angrily to Clement on the subject of his extravagance, utterly refusing to supplement his liberal allowance. Clement was like one distracted; he owed money all over the town, and had no means of paying. His creditors were clamorous and threatened to acquaint his tutor—a certain Mr. Barrett—of his shortcomings. In his desperation he sought me—his evil genius, and I wanted money. To make a long story short, I prevailed on him to commit a forgery on Mr. Barrett's name, saying he would never be suspected, that he could easily refund the money on receipt of his next monthly allowance.

"It was dreadfully hard work to conquer his scruples, but I succeeded at last, the cheque was forged and cashed, but detection followed quickly. Two days after, whilst Clement sat with me at the cottage, Mr. Dane and his tutor were announced. It appears the latter had easily traced the forgery to Clement, and had at once telegraphed for his father. He was very kind and generous, refusing either to prosecute my husband or publish the offender's name; but anything more dreadful than Mr. Dane's anger I have never known, and I am not a mild woman myself. When Clement confessed to his marriage his violence knew no bounds. I believe but for Mr. Barrett's presence he would have fallen on us both with tooth and nail. He swore never to see or speak with his son again. The tutor, however, pleaded for us, alternately coaxing and entreating, until he was in a more reasonable frame of mind.

"The upshot of it all was that Clement was to keep his remaining terms; that his father would pay all his debts, but that he should have no distraction from study; and to ensure this, I was to reside at a remote village in Suffolk, and to hold no communication with him until his twenty-first birthday, when we could resume our old relationship should we so wish it.

"I readily consented to these terms, especially as I was liberally provided for, and my youthful husband's presence wearied me beyond measure. The cottage was given up, and I started at once for my new home.

"Soon I heard of Clement as a penitent and model young man; then that he was studying for the Church; then I lost sight of him for a time, and, growing insufferably weary of my monotonous life, just before the term of our probation ended, I ran away.

"I came to town, quickly securing an engagement at a third-rate music-hall, and it pleased me to think that by so doing I had brought disgrace upon the haughty Dane family.

"I do not think they ever sought for tidings of me, they were only too glad that I had taken my fate in my own hands. Of course it would have been easy for Clement to get a separation, but he knew me well enough to guess that at the first alarm I should make public his crime—the crime which was of my own instigating—and so he held his peace.

"The years crept by, and by my own dissipation I lost one engagement after another, until I found myself without employment and without money; then occurred to me a diabolical plot. I prevailed upon a friend to write my husband news of my death; to beg for funds with which to bury me, and discharge my little debts.

"A fellow artist had died of a malignant fever; we held the doctor's certificate of death—it bore my name. The funeral was, of course hurried on, and when Clement himself arrived upon the scene, he was shown my supposed grave, and so believed himself freed from the fetters which so long had galled him.

"With the money he entrusted to my friend I contrived to exist until I secured a new engagement, and, in some way, I kept my head above water for a few short years.

"Then my voice began to fail, and having heard that Clement was installed as vicar of Stillbrook, I determined to make a personal appeal to him. Once in the town, I learned he was about to marry a young and pretty girl; heard, too, that he was immaculate in every relation of life.

"I was amused, and I was not inclined to be merciful. I went at once to the Vicarage, where my reception was of a most unflattering description; my husband utterly refusing to receive me into his home, disbelieving all my promises of reformation; and growing angry, I threatened to acquaint his people with his hidden crime.

"In the end he begged time for thought, and we travelled to London together; there he left me, and from then until now I have never

seen him. But I beg of you to find him, and tell him I was sorry at the last—that never any more shall I trouble his peace."

"I promise," said Dr. Armstrong gravely. He was unfeignedly shocked by the wretched creature's disclosure; he was full of pity for the man he had once condemned in his own heart; but, perhaps, most of all, he pitied this poor belouled, begrimed woman, whose life might have been so happy and honoured, had she willed it. "What can I do for you?" he asked, "anything that can relieve your suffering, or minister to your need?"

She interrupted him quickly, tears in her hollow eyes.

"You are very good; there are not many like you. No—no, you can do nothing—it will all be over soon."

"May I send my daughter to you. She will be glad to give you help."

"No, no; let no woman but those of my own lost condition look upon me—let none other see me in my degradation. Oh, my lost chances! My spoiled and wicked life! Heaven forgive me. Heaven help him to forget the misery I made him bear."

The doctor was silent a moment, then he asked,—

"Will you let me come again?"

"Yes; you may come to-morrow if you will; you have done me good."

CHAPTER V.

DOCTOR ARMSTRONG walked home slowly and thoughtfully. He was unfeignedly grieved for Clement Dane. He being so young when his temptation came; he had suffered so sorely through his fall. Perhaps now, as before, all search for him would be vain, and he would go down to the grave ignorant of his release, all unconscious that Alice loved him still, and was always looking for his return.

He was a merciful man, too, and he even felt a deep compassion for that poor lost soul, dying in the dirty garret, with no friend near but a woman more degraded than herself, and yet with some remnant of the angel still in her fallen nature.

Evidently Kate Dane had once been beautiful, she had education and talents; and yet what had she done with all those goodly gifts?

The doctor looked so grave when he entered the hall that Alice laid her hand affectionately upon his arm.

"What is it, dear? You have been to some particularly sorrowful case; tell me all about it. How weary you look!"

And she drew him gently in to their common sitting-room. He took her face between his hands with a gesture of infinite tenderness.

"Little woman! little woman! all the way home I have been thanking Heaven your marriage never took place. I have been hating myself, too, that I was so ready to misjudge the man who in all innocence would have wronged you."

She caught her breath, sharply.

"You have something to tell me of him," she said, gaspingly; "do not keep me in suspense. I have suffered so long."

"Poor child, poor child! I wish I brought you the news for which you yearn; but I do not. I can only tell you the story of his life, the reason of his flight from Stillbrook."

And then he related all that Kate Dane had disclosed, Alice listening with her face hidden on his breast; but when he had made an end of it all, she looked up.

"Take me to her, she must not die alone; he would not wish it."

"But I hardly think she would consent to see you, and it would be a dreadful ordeal to you."

"Do not refuse permission. I cannot rest satisfied until I have done something for her;" and, as she always did, she won her way with the Doctor.

Late at night he took her to Kate Dane's dreary lodgings, Alice being well supplied with invalid delicacies.

She clung to him very closely. The awful lanes were more awful still at night, and Alice was not physically brave; but they reached the house at last, and guiding her carefully up the broken stairs, her father brought her to the poor attic.

Kate turned her weary head upon her pillow as they stood in the open doorway, and seeing that fair young face, so sweet in its purity and its compassion, feebly prayed them to go away.

"Leave us," said Alice to her father, "wait for me below; I will not keep you long." Then she stole to the bedside.

"I heard you were very ill, and I hoped you would like me to come. I have brought you some jelly—it will ease the distressing cough, and give you new strength. Let me raise you—so! Now—a spoon if you please," with a glance at the other occupant of the garret. "You, too, need nourishment," she added, gently. "You must let me be nurse to you both a little while, and I will come again if I may."

The woman who rented the room made no response; she had turned away with tears in her usually hard eyes—you see she had been a stranger to kindness all her life; but Kate Dane, snatching one of the little soft hands to her breast, held it there whilst she sobbed out,—

"Heaven bless you! Heaven bless you! although you make me feel my own wickedness more keenly. Child, keep your purity and goodness. I—I, alas! have lost everything I should have prized! If you would kiss me—if I only dared hope you would show me such kindness—"

Without a word Alice bent over that dying face, laying her lips to that clammy brow, whilst her tears fell fast.

"You are really sorry for me," Kate gasped, "although I don't know why you should be! I have never seen you before; and I have been a cruel woman!"

"Hush! hush! do not distress yourself; try to think of what is before you, and to hope."

When the Doctor returned for his daughter she had but just risen from her knees. Her face was very pale, and her eyes were red with weeping.

"I am ready, dear," she said, then turned to speak a last word to the dying woman.

"Come again," she faintly articulated, as she clung to her parting hand, and seeing that Alice was utterly worn out, Dr. Armstrong answered for her.

"She shall come so soon as she is rested; and I will call quite early in the morning."

"If you please," Kate answered, feebly, "you have been very good to me."

But on the morrow Kate Dane was dead.

"She went off quite peaceful-like," her companion said; "and now, poor dear, she'll be buried by the parish—she was a lady born, as she told me times and again."

"I will attend to her funeral," he answered, "you need not trouble the parish. I will send up an undertaker at once, and will call round to-morrow to see that all things are ordered decently."

The morrow was Sunday, and after a wearisome day, for fever was rife in those crowded thoroughfares, he made his way towards Bingham's Court.

He had to pass "Gifford's room" as he went, and, hardly knowing why he did so, he paused outside to listen. A number of people were singing. Their voices were uncultured, they had no idea of time, some of them could scarcely sing a tune correctly, and yet they all joined with strong yearning in the words of "Jerusalem my happy home."

The doctor entered; his curiosity to see and hear Gentleman Jem was about to be gratified. Securing a very remote seat, he looked towards the far end of the room, and could scarcely repress a cry, as his eyes rested upon the solitary figure there.

It was that of a man poorly dressed, but

whose face bore unmistakable signs of birth and breeding. He was worn and aged, his cheeks sunken, his eyes hollow, his hair prematurely grey; but he was still Clement Dane. The doctor had found his man.

The hymn ended, the people sat down in orderly fashion. No one noticed the stranger; all eyes were turned upon the preacher, who had advanced a little to the front.

Few were his words, and simple; but they were eloquent, they spoke from his heart to theirs. Never in his happier days had he preached as now he did.

He used few gestures, his voice was low though distinct, and some of these poor souls sat listening with bated breath and tears streaming down their grimy faces.

But suddenly the flood of eloquence was arrested; the preacher's eyes rested a moment upon the doctor. He recoiled, uttered a low cry, flung out his arms with a gesture of mingled shame and pain, and sank huddled upon a chair.

In a moment there was confusion, but Dr. Armstrong rose to the occasion.

"There is no need for alarm. You know me! I am a friend of Gentleman Jem's, and I bring him good news. Leave me with him if you please!"

They filed out in orderly fashion, and when the last of them had disappeared, Armstrong, closing the door, went up to that shuddering, poorly-clad figure, and, laying his hands upon Clement's shoulders, said,—

"Look up, old boy. I come in all friendship to you. I know all the truth, all the follies and sins of your youth, and I pity your sufferings with all my heart. Dane, I bring you good news, Heaven forgive me that I rejoice in another's death; but your wife is gone! You are free! Don't you understand? You are free! and only Alice and I know your story!"

Then all the courage and control of those long, long months gave way, and with his head bent low, Clement Dane burst into wild sobs and tears.

But when he could look up, when he dared clasp the kindly hand outstretched to him, all the weariness and grief had left his haggard face, and he was a changed man.

The Doctor conveyed him at once to his own residence, and then went away to prepare Alice for their meeting.

When she came, when she saw him standing there, habited so poorly, his hands all roughened by toil, his face so worn and aged, she gave a little cry, and made as though she would take refuge in his arms all the better to comfort him. Then suddenly she paused, her face flushed deeply. The memory of the dead and erring wife stood between them.

"Clement," she said, in a voice all shaken with emotion, "you have no need to hide from us now. All the past is made plain to us, and if ever there was anything to forgive, it was forgiven long ago fully and freely. I thought my heart would have broken when the cruel months wore by bringing me no news of you. My days and nights were terrible with the fear that, driven mad by your cruel lot, you had found refuge in a suicide's death. I felt I could bear anything rather than that. And now for my sake, because I have held loyalty to you in all and through all, I want you to promise that with all your heart you will try to forgive the wrongs your wife did you. She was very penitent at the last; and just because she was your wife, and once you loved her dearly, you will not refuse to see her. I think she would have wished it."

"You are an angel!" he said, uncertainly. "No other woman would act or speak as you have done. Let all be as you desire. I never felt my own unworthiness so much as now when your white life stands out in such contrast to my own so defiled and degraded, when your sweet charity teaches me how much I have lacked this greatest of virtues."

She would let him say no more. Perhaps, too, she was afraid to trust her voice, and the

beating of her own heart all but choked her. She went hurriedly away to find Maggie. That worthy soul was busy concocting tartlets of a peculiar kind which the Doctor loved and patronised.

"Mercy!" she cried, as Alice entered, white and excited, "what's up?"

"Maggie! Maggie! he has come at last—Mr. Dane! Go to him. He will be glad to see you!"

Down went Maggie's rolling pin, off went her huge apron, as crying, "Now Heaven be praised!" she rushed from the room into her late master's presence.

Poor old Maggie, she had no scruples about the matter at all. Honestly and openly she threw her floury arms about Clement's neck, laughing and crying together, declaring she was quite content to die now that he had returned, and good days were coming for him and Miss Alice once again.

And to this man of sorrows her honest joy and affection were pleasant things. But he had walked so long in the shade that he was dazzled awhile by the bright sunshine of happiness, and in these first hours of restoration to all he prized had very little to say on any subject, and could only dumbly thank Heaven for the great blessing which had come to him when hope itself was dead.

On the morrow he went with Doctor Armstrong to see his unhappy wife's remains. All signs of dissipation and sin had passed from the waxen face; the long lashes rested on the cold cheeks, veiling the eyes, whose fire death only could quench; round the beautiful mouth—oh! so much more given to evil words and ribald jests than to sweet, womanly speech—was a calmness foreign to anything he had ever seen or known to Kate. "Death had left on her only the beautiful."

Left alone with this woman who had been his evil genius and his curse so long, he knelt down and prayed with a very humble heart indeed; and as he prayed, all resentment he might have nursed of her, all scorn and hatred passed from his heart, so that when he rose again he could say truly and earnestly as he leaned over her,—

"I forgive you! oh, you poor soul! I forgive you. Kate, can you hear me?" and he gently touched her hand. "Does it comfort you, I wonder, in another world to know that I no longer hate you? I hope so! I hope so!"

Then reverently covering the dead face he went downstairs into the noisome court, and returned for the last time to his own poor lodgings.

And when they buried Kate Dane, the only one who stood by her humble grave in capacity of mourner was the husband whose life she had so long made a burden, and who because of her sin must seek a home far away from his native land.

The Armstrongs did not return to Stillbrook. It came as a terrible shock to Butler when a letter from the Doctor informed him he had sold his house, and was about to emigrate to Australia together with his daughter and Maggie; Clement Dane, of course, accompanying them. He did not reply. He stated in "confidence" to some dozen ladies that his feelings were simply too much outraged to permit him to do so.

There was one last address in Gifford's room, and almost all of the people had gathered to hear "Gentleman Jem's" last words; and never would he or Alice forget the closing scene of their lives in England, the words of love and regret which broke from those who felt that they were losing their chiefest and dearest friends.

One of the weeping women there had good reason to remember them with blessings all her days; and that was Kate's poor, degraded friend, who found herself snatched from vice and misery, her future cared for, her past buried as though it had never been.

The Reverend Butler heard later that the little party had sailed, then he lost all sight and knowledge of them. He would have been

furious could he have learned the sequel of the story. Twelve months after his wife's death Clement went to Alice.

"Dear," he said, "you know my story. Are you still content to marry me?"

"More than content," she answered, gravely. "I love you with my whole heart, and it is my desire to minister to your happiness."

And what then? Well, of course, they were married, all the people belonging to Clement's pastorate visiting with each other to make the ceremony a glad one; and the good Doctor declared that although this auspicious day was the gladdest of his life, he yet hoped to see others more glad, and then he laughed until his eyes ran over with tears. Perhaps the laughter was intended to hide his deeper emotions; but Alice, with her arms about her husband's neck, whispered, reverently,—

"Heaven teach me how to recompense you for the past. Heaven keep us always loyal, always true."

[THE END.]

FACETIE.

INFORMED PURCHASER (to dog-fancier's brutal son): "See here, young man; what the deuce did your father mean by telling me that bull-dog would soon become attached to me? Look at me now." Boy: "Well, to look at yer clothes I should say father hadn't lied."

A PA woman entered a crowded car, and seizing a strap, stood on a gentleman's toes. As soon as he could extricate himself he arose and offered her his seat. "You are very kind, sir," she replied. "Not at all, madam," he replied, "it's not kindness—it's self-defence."

"Do not dose yourself with patent medicines, my son," said old Fogleby; "it's nothing more nor less than suicide." "But," asked the young man, "suppose my physician recommends patent medicine?" "In that case," said Fogleby, "it is murder, but the crime is not laid at your door."

PAINTER: "Pat, there's a hole in the roof of the church, and I am trying to collect enough money to repair it. Come, now, what will you contribute?" Pat: "Me services, sor." "What do you mean, Pat? You're no carpenter." "No; but if it rains next Sunday, o'll sit over the hole."

CHARLES: "Candour is a plagued, unavish, shabby sort of virtue. I asked my brother to be perfectly candid with me this morning, and he said—'May: 'What did he say?' 'Said I was a fool.' 'And what did you reply?' 'That I never saw the family likeness so strong before.'"

SAD EYED COMPOSITOR: "Wot gentleman can spare me a few quotes?" Foreman: "See here, Slog 13, that's the sixth time you asked for quotes in five minutes. Whatcher setting anyway?" Slog 13: "Well the rules of the paper says quote all slang, and I've got a take of the baseball editor's copy."

GUEST (at the party): "Did you notice that Mr. Small's collar and cuffs were shockingly untidy, his necktie out of shape, and the back of his coat all covered with lint and ravelings?" Ditto: "Yes. By the way, who was the lady that corrected him so sharply when he made that little mistake in his Greek quotation?" "That was his wife."

TEACHER (pointing to caricature of himself on blackboard): "Hollerback, you are the best of my pupils. Say, who drew that horrid face on the board?" Scholar: "Please, sir, my sense of honour forbids my acting the part of an informer, unless you assure the perpetrator of immunity from punishment." "Ah! for your sake we will let it pass this time. Now, who was it?" "I did it myself."

STRANGER: "Here is a little poem which I submitted to a number of my nearest and dearest friends, and they all said it was worth printing." Editor (who has friends himself): "I am delighted to get it, sir. A thing which a man's bosom friends fail to criticise must be about perfect."

A GERMAN nobleman while visiting England was invited to join in a fox-hunt. He accepted, and met with a slight accident, which he thus described: "I mount upon de horse, he gallop away very vell. We arrive at, what you call? Oh, a fence. De horse go up, and den, and den I do not remain."

"My dear little wife!" cried the horrified young husband, "you don't mean to tell me that you went and spent the whole of your allowance at once on that diamond pin?" "Well, I'm sure, Fred," sobbed the wife, "when you gave me the purse you told me there was my pin money."

EXAMINER: "I am surprised that you all have made mistakes in answering the question, where was Megon Charta signed? Think it over. Can no one tell me?" Little boy (at bottom of class): "I can, sir." Examiner: "Well?" Little boy: "At the bottom of the page."

He was profoundly interested in writing a letter. "Weren't you up to see your girl last night?" asked the man next to him. "Yes, I'm writing to her father now." "That's so? Asking him for her?" "No. Asking him for my overcoat and hat he didn't give me time to get as I went out."

FEMININE RIVALRY.—Little Dot: "Ma, may I take the baby out in my doll's pram?" Mamma: "Why, what for?" Little Dot: "Sissie Stuckup has a new doll 'at shuts its eyes an' cries 'Wah, wah!' I'm doin' to betend the baby is a doll and let her hear him yell. Then I dees she'll stop puttin' on airs."

"Don't you," said the earnest young woman, "sometimes have thoughts that are beyond your powers of expression?" "Ya'as; I frequently have thoughts that she verwy hab'd to express; and the worst of it is that when I get them expressed I cawn't help wonderin' why I went to all that trouble."

"HERE'S a letter from poor Carrie. She and her husband both want a divorce and neither can get it." "What's the matter?" "He, unknown to her, was about to elope with the governess, just as she, unknown to him, was about to elope with his secretary; they met in the dark and eloped with each other."

DUNE (at the railway restaurant): "Waiter, got any green peas?" Waiter: "Yes, sir; have some?" "Yaas; bring three." "Anything else, sir?" "Yes; a strawberry out in thin slices." "All right, boss; anything else?" "Ah, gwacious! what do you take me for; a perfect hog, eh?"

"NEVER fear, my dear," remarked a wife to her impecunious husband, "never fear; I still love you." "I know that," he replied; "but that doesn't help matters much." "I'll trust you always," she exclaimed. "Yes, my dear," he replied, with a sigh that came from his heart, "this is very fine, but unfortunately you are not the grocer."

"My darling," she murmured, "you know that I love you. Is this not enough for the present? Be sure that I will not a day for our wedding as soon as it is possible." "That's all right, Miranda," doggedly replied the young man, "but I hope you will remember that I've got to be married in this dress suit, and it won't last for ever."

"There," he said, fondly, "just to show you how much I thought of you, I took your picture with my new instantaneous camera. Here it is." "Do you think it looks like me?" she inquired, almost tearfully. "Why—er—yes, of course." "Then all is over. I cannot be yours. It must be my money and not myself that you seek."

"What do you say to a lady when you are at a ball?" asked a young gentleman who went to a ball for the first time. "Talk to her about her beauty," replied the friend who had been there before. "But suppose she hasn't got any?" "Then talk to her about the ugliness of the other women who are present."

CHAPPIE (hastily): "Dootah, my-aw-head feels awful! Does grip evah go to the brain?" Doctor: "Sometimes." Chappie: "I have pains rushin' around all ovah, in me arms, and hands, and feet, and everywhere." Doctor: "That's grip." Chappie: "Whaw's it trying to do, dootah?" Doctor: "Trying to find your brain, I guess."

DOCTOR, my son William is not well. He has not got any appetite, and he complains of headache and general debility." "My dear madame, the best thing is to try a simple household remedy." "What household remedy do you suggest, doctor?" "Deprive him of his latch key, so he will be obliged to stay at home after dark."

GALLANT COWBOY (after a soul-wearying performance by pretty hostess): "Er—what was that you just played?" Miss Pianottumpp: "Impromptu No. 976, by Poundwhishki. Did you like it?" Gallant Cowboy (with an effort): "Oh, yes, yes, every note of it, as you play it—yes, indeed. I was entranced by your—er—your lovely touch, you know. But if I ever catch that composer I'll shoot him!"

A LADY had in her employ an excellent girl who had one fault. Her face was always in a smudge. Mrs. — tried to tell her to wash her face without offending her, and at last resorted to strategy. "Do you know, Bridget," she remarked, in a confidential manner, "it is said that if you wash the face every day in hot soapy water it will make you beautiful." "Will it now?" answered the wily Bridget. "Sure it's a wonder you never tried it: yourself, ma'am."

HIS NAME.—Brown is a fellow who loves to push himself forward on all occasions. Not long ago he engaged a stranger in conversation in a hotel lobby, and after a few minutes he remarked: "Excuse me, but your name, please?" "Brown," replied the stranger, graciously. "Ah, mine is Brown also," he chirruped, with a pleased smile. The stranger's face was imperturbable. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Also," he said, very quietly, and Brown was flabbergasted.

"If your mother had twenty yards of stuff and made a dress requiring but eighteen yards, how much would she have left?" asked the teacher. "Mamma can't make her own dresses. She has tried often, and they are always either too—" "Suppose," interrupted the teacher, "she sent it to a dressmaker, how much would the dressmaker send back?" "Depends on which dressmaker she sent it to. Some wouldn't send back any," said the little girl. "Suppose she sent it to an honest one?" said the teacher impatiently. "Some of the honestest ones out there waste, so that there is never anything left, no matter how much you send 'em."

YE UNREASONABLE MALE BIPED.—Husband (compelled to write a hurried business letter at home): "Where in creation is the ink?" Wife: "In the front left-hand corner of my work-basket. That's on the corner of the dressing-table in the north-room upstairs." "Where's the paper?" "I am just out, but I believe the girl has some. I'll see." "Where are the pens?" "Somebody stepped on the pen last week and I forgot to get another, but I'll send over to Mrs. Make-shift's and see if she has one. She is always a borrowing mine." "Huh! Any one might think no one in this house ever wrote a letter." "Nonsense! There isn't a more voluminous correspondent anywhere than I am. You men can never wait a minute for anything. I'll warrant after I've half-killed myself getting all the things together you won't write a dozen lines."

SOCIETY.

The Empress of Germany is a champion knitter, and uses big wooden needles for most of the work she does.

All the Presidents of the United States have been married men (Cleveland marrying while President), except Buchanan.

SIR WILLIAM HARCOURT's eyesight is now in so unsatisfactory a condition that the gravest apprehensions are entertained by his friends.

The Lord Mayor is only the fourth Welshman to whom the civic chair in London has been filled during the seven hundred years of the Corporation's existence.

TABAC, russet, tan, and blue of all shades, dark, light, and intermediate, are the favourite coming colours amongst Parisian modistes.

The women of Poland will all wear black during the present year, in order to commemorate the centenary of the loss of Poland's independence as a nation.

The Archduke Joseph of Austria has set an excellent example in building sixty cottages for a colony of gypsies, and has had them taught agriculture and the trades.

PROFESSOR BLACKIE tells of a singular superstition existing in England, which insists that if the youngest daughter of a family marries first her sisters must dance at the wedding without shoes, so as to insure husbands for themselves.

PARIS has "talentiers" who make a profession of tying gentlemen's cravats. An expert artist in this line can earn forty francs an evening. If he ties "four-in-hands" he deserves his forty francs.

THE QUEEN will probably give the White Lodge, in Richmond Park, to the Duchess of Teck by a warrant, which would make the place her property for life, whereas it is now merely "lent" to her. The Queen has granted to Princess Victoria the style of "Serene Highness."

THERE is a rumour that the paring and combed-backed locks will be seen about once more, not as a sign of servitude, of hospital nursing, of Quakerism, of renewing the world, and of general goodness, but as a badge of social distinction.

PRINCESS MAUD OF WALES has been in delicate health for some time past, but it is hoped that she will be much benefited by her stay on the Riviera. Princess Maud will probably go to some bracing place in Switzerland or the Tyrol early in the summer, and in August she is to take the baths at Vichy.

A FACT of interest to women is the action of the Premier of New Zealand, who recently submitted a proposition to the House of Representatives that a new upper chamber be allowed to replace the old one, and that it consist entirely of women.

THERE is one thing for which we have great reason to be thankful, and that is, that some women have the good sense to shorten the length of their waists; whether in the interest of comfort or convenience it really matters little.

The eldest daughter of the Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh will be presented at the first Drawing Room of the year. Princess Marie is a tall girl of seventeen, and is certainly the prettiest of the Royal Family. Her sisters are also pretty girls, and the third, Princess Alexandra, is the one who most resembles her mother, the other two taking rather after their father.

It is said that two poor Parisian women, who earn a livelihood by making artificial flowers, have hit on a process of dyeing natural flowers in brilliant hues. Public attention was called to the matter by florists who received in a lot of flowers some sweet williams of a bright green colour.

STATISTICS.

TOMATOES were not cultivated 100 years ago. An acre of grass newly mown weighs nearly two and half tons.

IN the human skeleton at the time of maturity there are 165 bones.

A NATURALIST calculates that 100,000 rabbits are born in Australia daily.

THE microscope has revealed many wonders, among others that the common caterpillar has 4,000 muscles in his body; that the drone bee's eyes contain 1,300 mirrors; and that the large prominent eyes of the brilliant dragon-flies are each furnished with 28,000 polished lenses.

GEMS.

ALL imposture weakens confidence and chills benevolence.

INDOLENCE is the most laborious and unhealthful of occupations.

CONCEIT is the most incurable disease that is known to the human soul.

HAPPY the man who early learns the wide chasm that lies between his wishes and his powers.

WE must have kings, we must have nobles; nature is always providing such in every society; only let us have the real instead of the titular. In every society some are born to rule and some to advise. The chief is the chief all the world over, only not his cap and plume. It is only this dislike of the pretender which makes men sometimes unjust to the true and finished man.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

HINTS.—If your oven is too hot you can cool it by putting in a dish of water. If it is too hot on the top, lift the lids which are over the oven.

BREAKFAST CORN CAKE.—Sift one cup of flour, one cup of Indian meal, one and one-half teaspoonsful of cream tartar, and one teaspoonful of soda and a little salt together. Beat one egg, add one cup of sugar, then pour the wet ingredients in the dry; beat well, and bake.

BAKED APPLE PUDDING.—The yolks of four eggs, six large pippins, grated, three table-spoonsful of butter, one half cup of sugar, the juice and half the peel of one lemon. Beat the sugar and butter to a cream, stir in the yolks and lemon with the grated apples. Pour in a deep pudding-dish to bake. Whip the whites and add them last. Grate a little nutmeg over the top. Eat cold with cream.

EPICUREAN PORK.—Cut slices of "streak" salt pork; let them stand all night in enough water, sweetened with treacle, to cover them, and sprinkled on top with black pepper and powdered sage. Next morning cut thin and fry a tablespoonful of onion, and fry it to a golden-brown in a teaspoonful of butter; then dip the slices of pork in flour or rasped crumbs, so that both sides will be thickly coated, and fry to a light brown.

To make rock cake, take three-quarters of a pound of sweet almonds, blanched and cut into small pieces, one pound of pulverized sugar, and the whites of five eggs. Beat the whites until very dry, then add the sugar very gradually, a teaspoonful at a time; when done, stir in the almonds, place the mixture on white paper with a teaspoon, making them of a conical shape; put the paper on this and bake in a cool oven until they can be removed from the paper without breaking.

MISCELLANEOUS.

PORCELAIN is being made from asbestos. SPIDERS are seven times stronger in proportion than lions.

CONTRARY to the general impression, the loss of life in arctic exploration is not large.

It is said that Siberia, when opened up by the railway now building, will be one of the garden districts of the world.

It was not until the eleventh century that leather uppers were made for shoes. The wooden sole was still in use at that time.

There are 800 public baths in the city of Tokio, Japan, where natives are washed at a temperature of 160 degrees at the price of one halfpenny.

GERMAN parents sometimes change the name of their baby if it is ill; and the Japanese are said to change the names of their children four times.

THE finest opals in the world are found in Australia, those found in Mexico being of an inferior quality. The most perfect emeralds heretofore have come from Brazil and Siberia.

THE lightest metal known is lithium. Its specific gravity is only about half that of water. And of course it floats. It has little use in the mechanic arts, its chief employment being as a medicine.

PAPER quilts are coming into general use among the poorer classes abroad. They are made of sheets of white paper sewed together, and perforated all over at a distance of an inch or two apart.

THE early narcissi and daffodils that one sees in Covent Garden Market do not all come from the South of France. Some of them are cut from the tidy little gardens of the Scilly Islands.

PARENTS cannot name their children just what they please in Germany. By Imperial order, Government functionaries are forbidden henceforth to register any infant in a Christian name bearing the slightest relation to politics.

THE oldest diary in the world, according to a Japanese paper, is that of the Hozaka family, landed proprietors in the province of Kosobin. The diary has been conscientiously kept by the various heads of the family for more than three centuries.

SMALL singing birds live from eight to eighteen years. Ravens have lived for almost one hundred years in captivity, and parrots longer than that. Fowls live ten to twenty years (and are then sold as spring chickens to young housekeepers). The wild goose lives upwards of one hundred years, and swans are said to have attained the age of three hundred.

It is not safe to eat many peach kernels, on account of the large percentage which they contain of that most deadly of poisons, prussic acid. Almonds also contain prussic acid, but the good kinds have been cultivated so as to make the percentage of the poison as small as possible, and their shells as thin as may be.

CHILIAN money is of very little intrinsic value just now. It is simply small tags of pasteboard. The maker of each tag writes on it the sum for which he is willing to redeem it, and uses it as cash. It passes from hand to hand as money, and in time comes back to the original producer, whose duty it is to promptly redeem it.

A MOST extraordinary guard takes up its quarters inside the Bank of England every evening at seven o'clock all the year round, remaining there until seven o'clock the next morning. It is an officer's guard, and consists of a drummer, two sergeants, and thirty men, all well armed. Each man receives a shilling from the bank authorities immediately upon his arrival, a sergeant's share being two shillings. The officer is allowed a supper and two or three bottles of wine, and is permitted to invite a friend if he sees fit to do so.

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OSCAR.—The army of Italy on a war footing is nominally 2,448,000, that of Russia is 2,151,000.

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ANXIOUS.—The quickest time of a cablegram, Liverpool to New York, is one minute and thirty seconds.

DOLLY.—On the North American Continent, as here, spring is the great cleansing and painting season.

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JULIET.—The B.A. hood of the London University is brown silk or stuff edged on the inside with russet-brown silk. The M.A. of Oxford is black silk lined with red silk.

CONSTANT READER.—Unfortunately we cannot help you, as we are not aware of a good book on aerated water making. Full instructions for the process are usually supplied with the machines necessary in it.

CHARLIE.—We cannot possibly tell whether your indentures are legal or otherwise, as we have not them before us. The mere fact of their not having been drawn up by a solicitor has nothing to do with their legality. From the meagre information before us we can only draw a conclusion, and that is that you would have to stay the rest of your term.

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By the shivering fits which chill us,
By the feverish heats which grill us,
By the pains acute which fill us,
By the aches which maul and mill us,
By the quacks who dragoon and pill us,
By the hydropaths who swell us,
By the allopaths who bill us,
By the nervous fears which kill us,
Tell us, tell us, wee Baedins,
What, and why, and whence you are?

Say, are you a germ atomic?
Have you uses economic?
Are you truly miasmatic?
Are you solid or lymphatic?
Frankly, is your cause symptomatic?
Are you native or exotic?
When your business is transacted
Is your stay to be protracted?
And do you intend, Baedins,
To return again and kill us?
Do make answer, if you please.

Tell us briefly, tiny mystery,
What's your source, and what's your history!
Clear the clouds of obfuscation
That surround your incubation!
Furnish, without more obstruction,
Your belated introduction!
Let us know your why and wherefore,
What is it you're in the air for.
And meanwhile, Oh, wee Baedins,
Since with morbid dread you fill us,
Fishes, take your leave at once!

OWARD.—Any duly-qualified surgeon-dentist will draw your teeth painlessly and safely by either administering "gas" to you or chilling the gum. You may stipulate for painlessness before you sit down.

DICK.—Scottish bagpipes have no mechanical contrivance other than the bag and the player's lungs for supplying air to the instrument, the bellows are the distinguishing features of the Irish pipes.

ANXIOUS MOTHER.—There is nothing that so promptly cuts short congestion of the lungs, sore throat, or rheumatism, as hot water when applied promptly and thoroughly.

JIM.—The only "heavies" now in the service are the 1st and 2nd Dragoons (Scots Greys); the "mediums" are the 1st to 7th Dragoon Guards, 6th Dragoons, and 5th, 9th, 12th, 16th, and 17th Lancers.

IGNORANCE.—Persia is an extensive country, and has a varying climate. In the south it is tropical; in the north, summer hot and winter very cold. Inhabitants Mohammedan, but as a rule mild and inoffensive.

GEOR.—The average weight of the adult European male brain is 49 oz. to 50 oz., that of the adult female brain 44 oz. to 45oz. In the newly-born male infant it is about 11½ oz., and in females 10½.

UNHAPPY MAX.—If you have the man's residential number, write to Under Secretary for War, Pall-mall, London, asking if he will cause inquiry to be made to ascertain if the man is well.

BERTRAM.—When geologists talk of the growth of rocks they refer to the period of their formation. It would be quite incorrect to attribute "growth" in any other sense to rocks, which have no life inherent in them.

MAY G.—We should think a good chemist's could supply what you require, or you could apply to a theatrical costumer; but we should never recommend the use of such things, except to those connected with the stage. Handwriting good, but could be improved by practice.

LOCARTIA.—Communicate with Registrar, Stationers' Hall, Ludgate-hill, London, asking him to send form of application for copyright. Send stamped envelope for reply. Mention what is your desire to copyright.

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TOMMY TUCKER.—No ship can fly the American flag as its ensign until it is owned and registered in the United States; but ships can be and are to a very large extent built for the United States owners in this country and registered in the States.

S. A. T.—Situations generally are got by answering advertisements, but also often through the teachers of the art of writing, who are applied to recommend an efficient hand. A good knowledge of business terms is very essential; after that, general intelligence.

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INQUIRER.—The civil service, like the military service, is a whole bundle of professions and trades. It includes lawyers, linguists, clerks, surveyors, etc., and all kinds of tradesmen—all, in fact, who are employed under Government and not directly connected with the army.

AMBITIOUS YOUTH.—Should not count any of the Household regiments specially desirable for an enterprising youth; the men are never out of the country. Still, if you like to be always within hail London, and are 5 feet 11 inches high, you may join any of these regiments presently requiring recruits.

M. A.—The glass most used for making the paste of which false precious stones are manufactured, is called strass. German strass, named after the man who first discovered it. It can be coloured with oxides of metals so perfectly, it is said, that the false stones can scarcely be told from the real ones.

GRACE.—You may go either to Boston or Philadelphia for about £4 as a stowage passenger, and would have little difficulty in obtaining a situation as a domestic servant in either town. The time to go is in April. We should, however, have liked you to tell us why you wish to go—what you hope to gain by doing so. Be sure, at least, that your reason is well founded.

TOMY.—The Scotch "not proven" is equal to the English "not guilty" in that it sets the prisoner free. He cannot be put on trial again for same crime even though additional evidence against him should be obtained; but while it relieves him from risk of future trial it does not relieve him from suspicion. He leaves the Court with a stigma attaching to him which does not follow the "not guilty" prisoner.

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Tell us, tell us, wee Bacillus,
What, and why, and whence you are?

Say, are you a germ atomic?
Have you uses economic?
Are you truly misanthropic?
Are you solid or lymphatic?
Frankly, is your cause symptomatic?
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When your business is transacted
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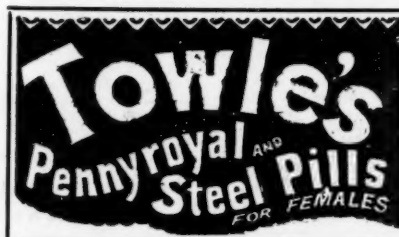
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